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TRB

from Washington
December 9, 1978

Sneaking Past the Senate

We are coming back in the 12-car presidential train in September 1940 after inspecting a defense factory in Charleston, West Virginia when we are summoned to a mysterious press conference. In the little sitting room at the end, from which he has emerged so often to the rear platform—bands playing, crowds cheering—23 of us jam in. No preliminaries. In 10 minutes, Roosevelt tells us, a special message will be read to Congress that is the most important event in American defense since the Louisiana Purchase. We gasp. The train sways. Twin rails recede outside, with the Kanawah River below. Steve Early's legs dangle on a radio. Instinctively we look at the sole exit and Roosevelt grins puckishly. Yes, he has agreed to swap 50 mothballed destroyers for leases of British bases in Newfoundland and the Caribbean.

I never saw a man exude more satisfaction. Somebody has to ask the question that he has ostentatiously refrained from raising, so I do. How about Congress? He is waiting for me and says tartly that I haven't been listening: this is an *executive agreement*: Congress, in other words, has been ignored. If it were a *treaty* one third of the Senate could veto it; this way the boats are even now. . . . He breaks off dramatically. In the midst of his mercurial performance FDR asks us innocently how we would pronounce "epochal." Is the accent on the first or second syllable?

I think of it now because America soon gets a bigger issue, the SALT II agreement, and Jimmy Carter won't say that it will be sent up as a treaty. He has been asked point-blank and has refused to answer. As a treaty, 34 members of a Congress of 535 can kill it. Rejecting it after Brezhnev has personally committed himself to it would push the Cold War back to its worst days. Almost certainly, I think, Carter won't try the executive agreement route. But he is keeping his options open.

Carter got the Panama Canal treaties through with one vote to spare. "It was the most difficult task I have ever assumed," he says, "more difficult than being elected president, much more difficult than the Camp David agreement." SALT II will be harder still. General Maxwell Taylor told the American Enterprise Institute last summer that chances of a Senate two-thirds are "so slight as to justify the withholding of the treaty by the president to avoid the consequences of rejection." Consequences?—"a political disaster of major dimensions," Taylor says. It would, in fact, be comparable to the Senate rejection of the Versailles Treaty in 1920 that kept the US out of the League of Nations and insured World War II: at all times the Senate had two-thirds for *some* treaty, but never two-thirds for a *specific* treaty.

No wonder executive agreements have grown! Former senator Sam Ervin did some figuring: as recently as 1930 the ratio of treaties to agreements was 25 to 9. But in 1968 alone, he found, the president concluded 16 treaties and 266 executive agreements. By 1972 the US had 947 treaties and 4359 executive agreements. Historian James MacGregor Burns says agreements "had the same standing under international law as did treaties and they dealt with equally portentous matters." Will Carter go this route? It seems almost inconceivable. It would set off the damnedest White House-congressional row of this generation. But there is going to be a row anyway. Presidential assistant Hamilton Jordan says flatly, it "will be the most important thing this Congress has to vote on. . . . SALT II will dictate our defense posture in the world, will shape the tone and quality of our relationship with the Soviet Union." Nuclear stakes, in short, are high.

Lines are forming. The American Security Council, granddaddy of the military-industrial complex, has created its Coalition for Peace Through Strength and is reaching out for the hawks like the American Coalition of Patriotic Societies and the Committee on the Present Danger. The election knocked off five liberal Democrats. Senators Jackson and Moynihan will guide the hawks. After the US agreed to trade with Moscow on non-discriminatory terms in 1972, Jackson got through his amendment making trade equality contigent on dropping Soviet emigration controls; the Russians promptly sank the trade agreement altogether, and Jewish emigration, which had gradually risen to 35,000 in 1973, fell to 13,000 in 1976.

Carter is girding for the struggle, too—he is appeasing the hawks. They will charge he is "soft" on Communism. (A full page ad in *The Wall Street Journal*, November 15, inserted by *TV Guide*, cried that "The US has conceded to the Soviet Union parity in strategic nuclear weapons.") The battle has begun; it will be nasty; it will be complex; it could shape our destiny. Carter's appeasements so far: arms negotiator Paul Warnke, hated by hard-liners, has stepped down; the US military budget will be increased by three percent—about $15 billion (while welfare is slashed); a preposterous civil defense city-evacuation program costing one or two billion dollars is proposed, though I find it hard to believe Carter takes it seriously; the Pentagon reassures the nation that the US cruise missile can penetrate Soviet defenses no matter what Moscow does. There will be more of this. The price of Carter appeasement is high; the cost of failure is higher: the Senate Budget Committee last spring said that without SALT, arms spending over the next 15 years will increase by $100 billion.

Let's follow President Carter some night into his study upstairs in the White House where he has a big terrestrial globe; he seats himself, rotates it to the vast expanse of Russia, tries to put himself in the Russians' place. Brezhnev last week angrily told the Central Committee it must produce more. (From an economy half America's Russia spends 16 percent of gross national product for arms—a fearful burden.) Are they ready to negotiate? Has the time come? Or are the two superpowers as mad as the suicide cult in Guyana, bound ultimately to destroy themselves and their families?

Carter's views on the Russians are known: they are not monsters. Nixon met thrice with Brezhnev, Ford once. George Kennan called Kremlin leaders "perhaps the most conservative ruling group to be found anywhere in the world, markedly advanced in age, approaching the end of their tenure, and given to anything else but rash adventure." Maybe so. At Annapolis last June Carter gave them the choice, cooperation or confrontation. And so he sits before the globe. What will the Senate do? Treaty or agreement? If he leads, will America follow?

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Correspondence

No Attila the Hun

To the editors:

I am not Attila the Hun. This may come as a surprise to readers of your November 18 issue who happened to see Lester C. Thurow's review of my new book, *America's Dilemma: Jobs vs. Prices.*

I cannot possibly attempt here to recount the extensive material contained within my book that Mr. Thurow chose conveniently to neglect in making his points—for example, an extensive discussion of the difficulty of central planning in an economy as big and diverse as ours. Permit me, however, to restate a message that your reviewer might at least have relayed: that, on the economic front, inflation has become public enemy number one, and to curb it will necessitate a diverse array of measures, some moderately painful, plus a great deal of wisdom in Washington. Let me quickly add that recent policymaking, from tighter credit to a new concern about federal spending, indicates a modest movement in the appropriate direction.

This emerging wisdom in Washington must cause Mr. Thurow far more dismay than my book. After all, once upon a time he served informally as an economic adviser to the Carter White House. And his prescription, plainly stated in his review, entails quite simply "incomes policies" and "policies to stop price increases in particular industries." Although he raises a question about our respective moral judgments, I will say nothing, and merely shudder, at a morality that sees controls—would Mr. Thurow be our controller?—as the only answer to inflation in a society that wishes a reasonable degree of individual freedom. He mentions health care as a "particular" industry. As a college parent, let me suggest an alternate: academia, where Mr. Thurow resides.

Alfred L. Malabre Jr.
New York City

Flogging a dead horse

To the editors:

Bravo Robert Lekachman! In his analysis (*TNR*, November 11) of President Carter's so-called anti-inflation program, he managed never to mention the fact that the nation's money supply (M1) has been galloping ahead for more than two years at an eight percent rate of increase. Lekachman's virtuoso performance is akin to explaining the smoldering ruins around one without ever suggesting that fire had anything to do with it.

What can account for his remarkable obtuseness? I suspect that in his zeal to flog the same dead horse—mandatory price/wage controls—Lekachman stands in horror of the facts intruding. For if a responsible Congress, Executive and Federal Reserve were to insist on modest and sensible economic policies (including a sustainable growth of money), there would be no call for the monolithic board of controllers that lights up Lekachman's soul.

No more convincing *reductio ad absurdum* could have been proffered to display the total irrelevance of the old economics in thrall to an ever bigger and busier bureaucracy.

Loren E. Lomasky
Department of Philosophy
University of Minnesota-Duluth
Duluth, Minnesota

On Homer's birthplace—and sex

To the editors:

Re: *TNR* of October 28 ("A New Natural Law"), p. 11, column 2. The "village" of Athens did not produce Homer.

Don't mention it.

Howard W. Clarke,
University of California
Santa Barbara

P.S. She was probably born in Ionia.

Blinders against science

To the editors:

Science does occasionally appear in the pages of *The New Republic*, sometimes through graceful, informative articles by Carl Sagan, most recently in a long review by Nicholas Wade of Edward O. Wilson's book *On Human Nature* (*TNR*, November 11). Nevertheless, your usual avoidance of science contrasts not only with its intrinsic merits as a human activity, but with its current decisive importance to human existence. One could hope that each article you do publish would take careful advantage of the opportunity to restore some balance.

For this reason it is disappointing that near the end of his attractive review Wade dismisses with heavy sarcasm Wilson's suggestion that the literary and cultural life of the nation has too little awareness of science. Wade says that the real problem lies with the unsatisfactory literary abilities of scientists.

Surely Wade's remark misses the point. We don't need to assign blame to anyone. By its nature the work of most scientists is rather fragmentary. And most scientists undoubtedly do write as badly as Wade says. But the character and future of the culture is of greater importance. Shouldn't the people who write well regard a proper public awareness and discussion of science as a challenge and an opportunity for themselves?

As one example of the blinders against science in American literature, I note that in the wonderful book *World of Our Fathers*, which recounts the Jewish experience in America, Irving Howe nowhere mentions the massive presence of Jews in American science. Nor does he even notice Albert Einstein as a role model.

Norman Austern
Department of Physics
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Dubious apologia for the Tory party

To the editors:

The dubious logic and factual inaccuracy of Mr. Soskin's apologia for Mrs. Thatcher and the Tory party ("Correspondence," *TNR*, November 4) suitably mirrors the poverty of Conservative contributions to political debate in Britain today.

You published his letter under the heading "Radical Conservatives." Who are these creatures? The only thing radical about the Tory party is their muddled adherence to monetarist economics to the exclusion of other forms of national housekeeping—a radical recipe for the economic extinction of the United Kingdom.

The leadership of the Tory Party has been forced off the middle ground (assuming they wanted to be on it) firstly by the substitution of Mrs.

(continued on page 36)

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

December 9, 1978

How the Rich Stay Rich

Even the most casual observer of our American democracy will have noticed the predominance of inherited wealth. Fewer will understand why this is so. Elaborate theories of monopoly capital have evolved, but a simpler explanation is an obscure loophole in the Internal Revenue Code. We are not referring to the legerdemain by which expensive lawyers make a farce of the federal estate tax. We are not even referring to the favored tax treatment given to all capital gains. We are referring to the ability of our richest citizens to escape any tax at all on the growth of their fortunes.

The tax reform act of 1976 began the process of closing what may be the largest loophole in the tax code. The 1978 tax bill reopened it, in an amendment tacked on at 3 a.m. the day the 95th Congress adjourned in October. Pleasantly enough for those who lobbied it through, this special favor for inherited wealth got almost no attention in the press during the confusion of the last hours, even though it could cost much more federal revenue than the notorious general reduction in capital gains taxes. It was a remarkable display of the power of the moneyed elite, taking advantage of the fealty of legislators and the ignorance of journalists.

The arrangement is not all that complex. It has to do with the way capital gains are measured for tax purposes. When you buy, say, a piece of real estate or a share of stock for $2000, then sell it a few years later for $5000, you have made a profit. The tax code says you have "realized" a "capital gain," which is less clear but more desirable since your taxes will be a lot less as a result of these strange terms. How much is your gain? It is the difference between what you paid—your "basis"—and what you sold it for. In this case it is $3000. Before actually paying any taxes you start deducting left and right, but that is not our sermon today. Our concern is what happens if you die before you sell the investment. A little reflection will suggest that this is a frequent occurrence. The deceased discovered lying on a mattress stuffed with dollar bills is not a common phenomenon, and becomes less common the higher one moves up the scale of wealth. Those with access to sound legal and accounting advice are likely to die owning stocks and bonds, racehorses and real estate, rather than cash. (Or, to put it another way, owning banks rather than bank accounts.)

The law before 1976 said that if you died owning assets that had appreciated in value, that appreciation was wiped out for tax purposes. Your heirs paid taxes only on the appreciation that occurred after your death. So, for example, if that stock, purchased for $2000, was worth $5000 when you died, and $6000 when your heir sold it, your heir would have to pay taxes on a capital gain of only $1000. In the language of tax lawyers, your death "stepped up" the "basis" from $2000, the price you paid, to $5000, the value when you died. The gain of $3000 that occurred before your death escaped taxation completely.

This is not a trivial technicality. The government loses more revenue because of the stepped-up basis rule than it brings in from all the capital gains that are taxed. The Treasury Department estimates that every year $20 billion of investment profits escape taxation forever because of this rule. This tax-free $20 billion is not spread evenly across the citizenry. It is not spread evenly across that fraction of the citizenry that enjoys investment profits. It is not even spread evenly across that small fraction of investors who die leaving large estates. Most of the benefit goes to those with fortunes large enough to set aside large chunks of appreciated property for their heirs. In 1972 the average estate of under $100,000 had $444 of untaxed appreciation, while the average estate of over one million dollars had almost a million dollars in untaxed appreciation. The effect of the stepped-up basis rule is to permit great fortunes to grow from one generation to the next while escaping even the reduced taxation the ordinary investor suffers on his capital gains.

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There are two simple ways to shut this loophole. The simplest is to tax the accrued gain at death, before passing the asset on to the heirs. An alternative is to make people who sell inherited assets pay tax on the whole profit since the asset was purchased and not just the part that accrued after they inherited it. This is called the "carryover basis" rule, and it already applies to gifts. If I buy stock for $2000 and give it to you when it's worth $5000, your "basis" is what I paid—$2000. If you sell it when it's worth $6000, you must pay taxes on $4000 of gain, not just the $1000 that's accrued since I gave it to you.

In 1976 Congress adopted a version of the carryover basis rule for inherited property. It would have required heirs to pay taxes on all increases in the value of property after January 1, 1977. The contributions of past generations to large family fortunes would remain tax-free, but those of future generations would be taxed like anybody else's money. The 1976 law included a $70,000 exemption, which means it wouldn't even affect 93 percent of those who die leaving property.

Immediately a campaign began to repeal the change. The lobbying was led by the associations of tax and probate lawyers, accountants, timber growers and farmers. (Farmers made the usual plea about saving family farms, although the tax of course would not affect any family farm until it was sold.) Taking advantage of the reactionary momentum of the 95th Congress and the confusion of the pre-adjournment tax bill battle, they won a three-year postponement of the carryover basis rule. Those millionaires farsighted enough to have died since January 1, 1977 will escape its sting, and Congress has until January 1, 1980 to decide whether to let the rule be reinstated. Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia is leading the fight for repeal and plans hearings this spring. House Ways and Means Chairman Al Ullman and the Carter administration claim to be adamant that there should be some taxation of investment profits that pass at death. They have agreed to raise the exemption to $175,000, which would limit the sting to only two percent of those who die with any estate. Even so, there will be a tough battle: this is the two percent that really counts.

The spoken argument against the carryover basis is that it is too complex. It is indeed complex, but so is the whole tax code and so are the affairs of anyone who leaves an estate of more than $175,000. Almost all the complexities could be avoided by the more radical step of taxing capital gains at death, but the lawyers and accountants of the wealthy do not find this option appealing. The Senate Budget Committee estimates that this change (and a similar change in the taxation of large gifts) would bring the federal government almost $10 billion in fiscal 1980, the budget President Carter is eagerly chopping right now. This amount is more than the government collects on all capital gains under current rules.

The stepped-up basis rule takes up just a few lines in that majestic document, the Internal Revenue Code. This thick volume of fine print is an almost impenetrable web of strange phrases, numbers and cross-references. Nothing you'd curl up with by the fire. But when read with patience and a little imagination, it opens up into a revealing portrait of our society, as panoramic as a Dickens novel (and as cynical as Evelyn Waugh). It is enlightening, for example, to compare the treatment the tax laws provide to inherited wealth with the treatment they give to the savings of ordinary people.

We have one character, let us call him Rockefeller, who has started out rich and, through skillful investment advice, has become even richer. He has invested in stocks, in fine art, in real estate. All these things grow more valuable and so Rockefeller grows richer, but he is not taxed on any of them until he sells them. When he sells one of these items, he doesn't have to pay any tax on 60 percent of his profit, because it is called a capital gain. (This is up from 50 percent thanks to the generosity of the 95th Congress.) If he is so rich that he can avoid selling these appreciated assets during his life, he wins the really big prize: the angel of death comes along to "step up" the "basis," and the profits of a lifetime escape tax forever.

Another character in our drama is Aunt Millie. She has a widow's mite of a few thousand dollars. She cannot afford investment advice, but she has seen those public service advertisements informing the citizenry that investing in United States savings bonds is both prudent and patriotic. So she takes the plunge. For her trouble, she gets six percent, compounded biannually. She, too, pays no taxes until she redeems the bonds. But when she does cash in, she gets no capital gains deduction. In effect, she has to pay two and a half times as much tax on her savings bond profit as she would if it were considered a capital gain. And what happens if she cashes in her chips before she cashes in her bonds? There is no stepped-up basis for US savings bonds. When her heirs redeem the bonds, they must pay taxes on all the interest that has accumulated since the day Aunt Millie bought them.

Finally, we have old Joe, Aunt Millie's handyman. He does not make enough money to worry about investment, but he tries to sock away a few dollars every week in a savings account at the local bank. The federal government's first contribution to old Joe's finances is to forbid the bank to pay him more than five percent interest on his savings. (The bank does not object.) Next, the government finds out from the bank how much interest Joe has received every year, and every April Joe must go down to the bank and remove enough money to pay his taxes on that year's gain. Rockefeller and Aunt Millie can keep investing not only their own share of each year's profits, but the government's share as well, until they cash in their investments. Aunt Millie, for example, is merrily

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compounding away at six percent. Joe must subtract the government's share from his five percent each year and then reinvest what's left. Over the years, it makes a big difference. The "deferral" effect (as it is called) enjoyed by Rockefeller and Aunt Millie amounts to an interest-free loan from the government. And of course Joe gets no capital gains deduction, so he pays two and a half times as much tax. And there are no taxes for his heirs to escape when he dies, because he has paid them all as he went along.

A real tear-jerker, isn't it? Since Congress closed the tax shelter for money-losing film investments in 1976, it's no longer reasonable to hope for a movie based on the Internal Revenue Code. But if only to restore their own self-esteem, the authors should rewrite the script.

White House Watch

Ratchet Racket

After meeting with Jimmy Carter at the White House last September 22, senators Alan Cranston of California and Herman Talmadge of Georgia told a staff assistant who motored back to the Capitol with them that the President had impressed them during a discussion of pending veterans pension legislation. Cranston is chairman and Talmadge is the ranking Democratic member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. They and their opposites on the House veterans committee had been trying to work out a conference compromise on increased pension levels. Carter had summoned the chief Senate and House conferees to the White House to tell them what he would and wouldn't accept and what he expected in the way of pension reforms. Cranston and Talmadge said that Carter had mastered the details of a complex subject, that he had made his expectations and requirements clear and that he had dealt skillfully with his visitors. He had never mentioned "veto." He had said that he knew they would act "responsibly" and that if they did he would sign the pension bill Congress sent him. Congress sent him a bill that was costly but less costly than either the original House or Senate versions would have been. It included the reforms that he most wanted, mainly narrowing the definitions of eligibility for pensions and stiffening the requirement that veterans and survivors in equal circumstances be treated equally.

On October 18 Carter signed a related bill, sponsored by Cranston, that increased the levels of compensation to veterans with service-connected disabilities—a benefit distinct from pensions—and increased the number of veterans and survivors of veterans entitled to disability compensation. He said when signing the disability bill that he was "looking forward" to signing the pension bill. It was then being revised in line with the requirements that he had stated on September 22 and that some of his assistants had elaborated in a meeting with House and Senate veterans committee staffs on September 25.

What is and is not implied by the headline on this account must be stated. "Racket" as used here does not mean crookery. It does mean that an interested party, soon to be identified, raised a loud and effective noise—a racket—about a "ratchet" that may or may not exist. The interested party misunderstood the meaning of the word as it is used in the tiny circle where it originated. And finally, before getting into the story, a few elementary facts about the veterans scene must be summarized in order to make the story understandable.

At the end of September 1,024,064 living veterans and 1,637,000 survivors of dead veterans were drawing pensions. The law signed by Carter November 4 raised the basic pension for an eligible veteran with no dependents from $2364 to $3550 per year. Pensions for veterans with dependents or with ailments that kept them "house-bound" and/or requiring "aid & attendance" could rise to amounts near double the basic allowance. Under recent law and the new law pensioners have to be technically though often not really disabled, either by age or infirmity, and under the new law they and their spouses must have very little or no income other than the pension. The old law allowed a pensioner much more additional income. Surviving spouses (usually but in these days not always widows) are allowed two thirds of what a veteran is allowed. "Pension" is a misnomer. Now and historically, it is really a minimum guaranteed income for needy veterans and their survivors. The new law emphasizes provable need and thereby makes the pension closer to a minimum allowed income in reality than it previously was. The President's Office of Management and Budget calculates that the new law will add about two billion dollars to pension costs over the next five years and, if not screwed up by Congress in the meantime, will begin to save money in or around 1987. The Congressional Budget Office is in approximate agreement with these estimates.

Disability compensation is something else. "Service-connected disability" is a loose term but generally it means wounds in combat or ailments demonstrably resulting from a veteran's military service. Disability ratings, which determine the level of compensation, range from zero (that's right) to 100 percent. Twenty seven thousand people with disability ratings from zero to 10 percent received military compensation payments as of September 30. On that date 1,794,871 living veterans and 463,919 survivors received compensation payments. Disability ratings are connected with but do not specifically refer to degrees of physical impairment.

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They are calculations of the proportion of income that a disabled veteran could earn if he or she were not disabled. It is assumed, for instance, that a veteran who lost a leg in combat and has a 60 percent disability rating earns only 40 percent as much money as he would if he had both his legs. Some 82 percent of all veterans eligible for and receiving compensation payments have 60 percent or lower disability ratings. The largest number, 876,000, are rated 10 percent disabled. Totally (100 percent) disabled veterans are eligible for tax-free annual payments of $27,000, a grant of $30,000 toward the purchase or remodeling of a house they can live in, $3800 toward the purchase or reequipment of a car they can drive and other perquisites. The 122,000 totally disabled veterans drawing benefits at this level on September 30 included Max Cleland, the head of the Veterans Administration, and Robert Muller, founder and director of the Council of Vietnam Veterans, Inc. Cleland's legs were blown off by a grenade and Muller's spine was severed by an enemy bullet in Vietnam. A VA press spokesman and the CVV's counsel and lobbyist, Stuart Feldman, said in late November that Cleland and Muller were drawing the compensation for which they are eligible. Disability compensation is in addition to all other income, in this instance Cleland's and Muller's government and council salaries. Concerned officials are fond of saying, sometimes in rather disgruntled tones, that Nelson Rockefeller could draw his tax-free $27,000 a year—increased 7.3 percent by this year's law—if he were a totally disabled veteran.

Muller and Feldman, especially Feldman, are central figures in our story. Their and their council's guiding view is that Vietnam veterans should get a bigger share of available federal money than they are getting. The council claims no membership and is mainly financed by what Feldman calls "the eastern chapter" of the Paralyzed Veterans of America. Paralyzed veterans are, by definition, eligible for the federal benefits previously enumerated. The council is fundamentally opposed to the concept of pensions based on need as distinct from service-connected compensation for veterans. Its unstated but basic premise is that many—maybe most, conceivably all—Vietnam veterans suffer from disabilities that are service-connected in the sense that they served in a lousy war that nobody loves or wants to be reminded of. The council's bible is a report issued in 1956 by a commission headed by retired General Omar Bradley. The Bradley commission concluded that the widening system of Social Security and other minimal support for all Americans should be relied on to care for merely needy veterans and that "within the not too distant future a separate veterans' pension program should no longer be necessary."

Feldman, a lawyer who is a veteran of Washington's welfare wars but not of military service and war, is the council's front-line battler. Some of his adversaries in congressional, executive and veterans organization bureaucracies welcome the fact that they deal with Feldman rather than with Muller, who is paralyzed from the chest down. "My God," a senior member of a congressional committee staff said the other day, "I couldn't kick around a paraplegic." The staffer feels free to kick around but cannot ignore Feldman, who in the committee assistant's view is a fount of distorted information. This reporter shares that view while giving Feldman credit for dedication, knowledge of his subject and the guts to fight for what he believes.

One of his beliefs is that the pension law recently signed by Carter will have a disastrous "ratchet effect" on the future cost of veterans' compensation. A connected proposition is that the assistants upon whom Carter relied for advice before he signed the bill didn't understand this or, if they did, kept the facts and understanding from the President.

This "ratchet" business has a revealing history. Feldman picked up the term in late October from a friend who once served in the federal budget bureau. "Ratchet" in bureau parlance means or used to mean the final squeezing and wrenching of departmental and agency budget requests down to totals within the limits set by presidents and, recently, by congressional budget committees. Feldman understood it to mean the effect of budget levels and increases upon *future* budget levels and federal costs. A testament to his extraordinary impact is the fact that budget and other officials are beginning to give "ratchet" the meaning that Feldman mistakenly gave it.

In a letter dated November 1 and addressed to 15 "key White House assistants," Feldman argued that the increased pension levels of the new pension bill would inevitably cause disabled veterans to demand and Congress to grant increases in disability compensation amounting over the next five years to $9.5 billion. Including the added first-year cost of the pension bill, the total "ratchet effect" would—he said—be at least $11.5 billion. In a letter dated November 8 to Bert Carp, a deputy chief of Carter's domestic policy staff, Feldman jumped the five-year "ratchet effect" in added disability costs to $30 billion. This came about as follows.

Feldman put together and the *Congressional Quarterly* printed a table showing that since 1945 basic disability compensation levels and costs had increased every time basic pension levels and costs increased. The increases and ratios varied from year to year. Nevertheless, the unbroken sequence of dual increases enabled Feldman to argue that pension increases were connected to and were invariably followed by compensation increases. He submitted the table and the conclusion he drew from it to Alair Townsend, a House budget committee analyst. She asked Kathleen (Nina) Shepherd, a Congressional Budget Office statistician and analyst, to project the cost over the next five years of maintaining the ratio between present disability compensation levels and the increased basic pension

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levels provided in the new pension bill. Shepherd was asked to assume, and did assume, that Congress would vote the annual increases in compensation payments necessary to maintain the ratio, having in mind that Congress in the new pension bill had mandated annual cost-of-living increases in the basic pension levels. Shepherd came up with a five-year added compensation cost of $30.2 billion and passed this figure to Townsend. She and Feldman say that he got it from somebody else. Thus was born Feldman's revised "ratchet effect."

CBO's assistant director, James Blum, said on November 29 that the Shepherd projection was never cleared with him and CBO director Alice Rivlin and therefore is not a certified CBO projection. Its only official sanction to date is that it appears as a speculative figure in one of Alair Townsend's "issue papers." Shepherd and Townsend say that they do not assume that Congress actually will do what the projection assumes it will do. Blum says that CBO certainly does not assume it. Spokesmen for the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans, the old-line veterans' organizations most likely to react to the new pension levels as Feldman assumes, said in late November that their organizations had no intention of demanding compensation increases on the scale predicted by Feldman.

Feldman called his new ratchet figure a "CBO projection" and "CBO information" when he passed it to journalists and officials. He accused White House and Office of Management and Budget assistants of frustrating efforts to get the projection and its implications to Carter before he signed the new pension bill. He alarmed Alfred Kahn, the President's new anti-inflation counsellor, with the projection and told reporters that Kahn wished he had advised the President to veto the bill. Dennis Rapp, Kahn's chief assistant and Feldman's friend of many years, guesses that Kahn may have advised a veto if he'd been on the inflation job long enough to review the pension bill adequately. Rapp says that Kahn wasn't on board soon enough to make any pension recommendation to the President and rejects the story, put around by Feldman, that other advisers saw to it that Kahn never had a chance to advise Carter to veto the bill.

Carter had to accept or veto the bill by Monday evening, November 6. Kahn, Rapp and two staff specialists on veterans' affairs, Ellen Goldstein at the White House and Suzanne Woolsey at OMB, didn't know when they came to work Monday morning that the White House press office had announced the previous day that the President had signed the pension bill and seven others Saturday, November 4. Kahn thought he still had time to submit a written recommendation to Carter and he discussed the possibility with Woolsey. She believed Feldman's ratchet theory was phony. She also believed that the pension levels in the new bill were excessive and potentially inflationary, and she so informed Kahn. Nevertheless, she also told Kahn, only the director of OMB, James T. McIntyre Jr., could speak for it and in any event she agreed with everyone else involved that the President was morally and politically obligated to sign the bill.

John Osborne

The cultist in me and you.

My Heart Belongs To Dad

It was 15 years to the week between the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the massacre at Jonestown. Even though the two events are of a vastly different order, they have met with a curiously similar public response: a compulsive searching for explanation, whether cosmic, social, political or psychological. One would have thought this country, after experiencing so much shock and woe since 1963, would now be too jaded to ask the kind of questions that have been consuming us all week. But there they are: How could those people submit their wills to a man like Jones? How could they stay with him? How could they kill themselves? How could they kill *their babies?* Ultimately, we have all been looking for an answer to a question we asked back in 1963: Is this the product of a peculiar lunacy, or does it reflect on us all?

The natural reaction to an event of such horror is to distance oneself from it—to blame it on somebody else or make it seem the act of somebody strange. *This would never have happened if Congressman Ryan hadn't been out after publicity,* was the way some people handled the news from Jonestown. *It was those TV cameras that drove them over the edge,* was another explanation. *Why didn't the State Department know what was going on in Guyana?* is a question I've asked myself, but it's not an explanation of what happened, and it's not at all clear what the US government could have done about it even if it had known what was going on.

Other scapegoats abound in public print and private conversation. One of the more deserving is Mark Lane, who did have an idea how explosive Jonestown was, kept his mouth shut about it until more than 900 people were dead, and then, the moral maggot, sought to blame it on the CIA, the FBI and the United States in general. *Tass* and *Pravda,* along the same line, have recast their usual indictment of American social evils (neglecting to mention religious liberty) and said *all this* was responsible. Here at home, various columnists and

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commentators have swelled the list of "others" that we all can point to in order to keep the terror of Jonestown from ourselves. It was religion, some say. It was socialism. It was cults. It was California. It was the jungle. It was Jones.

In fact, it *was* Jones, in part. For without Jones (or someone like him) there could have been no Jonestown massacre. It was Jones's magnetism that drew acolytes into the People's Temple. It was Jones, using a combination of entry rites, tithing, fellowship, social services, psychic rewards and (increasingly) physical punishments, who kept his followers committed to him, even as he descended into paranoia.

drawing by La Mouche

Clergymen of traditional denominations say it requires self-discipline and peer counseling to keep them from absorbing the adulation of parishioners and beginning to believe themselves superhuman. Jim Jones had no such discipline and he had no peers. His power corrupted him completely. When journalists began exposing brutality, sexual aberration and theft in his temple in California, he fled with his flock to the jungle. There he became the Emperor Jones, as in Eugene O'Neill's play. In isolation from all civilized values, he went absolutely mad. His followers, isolated from all influences but him, followed him into his maelstrom.

To blame Jones for the events in Jonestown, I think, is to absolve both religion and socialism. It's being argued that suicidal zealotry is some sort of logical extension of a belief in God and that collectivism inevitably leads to maniacal dictatorship. But the evidence is that Jim Jones used both Christianity and Marxism as cloaks, though he actually understood and believed in neither. He is quoted as saying in Indianapolis, at the outset of his career, that religion was a way of making money without getting his hands dirty working. He seems gradually to have become his own god, and a rapacious, acquisitive, unbrotherly one at that. He was about as religious as Josef Stalin and about as socialist as Tourquemada, and neither Marx nor Jesus should be held responsible for him.

If Jones somehow had survived Jonestown, as Charles Manson did his helter skelter, the American public might have been satisfied to see punishment inflicted on him and his henchmen as a way of exorcising the ghosts of Guyana from its consciousness. But with Jones dead, it seems likely that the country will make a collective scapegoat of other nontraditional cults. Tom Robbins, a Queens College expert on so-called "new religious movements," says he expects a "wholesale witchhunt" against such groups as Hare Krishna, Synanon, Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, the Children of God and other non-established groups. He says he expects congressional and grand jury investigations, and also efforts in state legislatures to overturn court decisions restricting the ability of relatives to kidnap and "deprogram" cultists.

According to Robbins, an anti-cult "hysteria" is set to break loose just at a time when "the growth curve of these movements is on the wane." Statistics on cults tend to be anybody's guess, but it looks as if the way-out religions either are adapting to social change, becoming conventional or waning in importance. The Children of God, for example, have shifted recruiters from hippie enclaves to the disco scene, sending women into singles bars for "flirty fishing" among men who can't succeed at picking up other girls. Jesus freaks and charismatic Catholics seem to be drawing closer to traditional denominations, and middle-class young people seem to be turning away from Eastern religion back to booze, pot and fraternity parties.

There is no question that Sun Myung Moon and Synanon deserve investigation and prosecution to the extent that they have violated the law. But coming down on them will not make Jonestown go away, even though we may try to make it do so. For there is more to Jonestown than Jones or cults or California. *Newsweek* columnist Meg Greenfield has hit on part of it when she says that the images we have of Jonestown resonate with "the dark impulses that lurk in every private psyche" and that "what made the Jonestown affair such a disturbing metaphor . . . was its reminder that the jungle is only a few yards away."

I think Greenfield is profoundly right. But I also think there is a non-jungle dimension to the Jonestown experience, an American one. Why did people join the Peoples' Temple in the first place? Why did they stay? The push-them-away answer is, "Well, they were poor and black, drug addicts, old people, easy to fool. It could never happen to me." But this cult and others have

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thrived because of things that have been missing from American society as a whole.

What have the sects offered? Fellowship, love, an opportunity for commitment, but most of all, authority. Name a traditional American institution and it is virtually certain that its authority has been undermined: the family, the church, schools, the government, the presidency. Once children rebelled against the religion of their parents by "losing their faith." But with their parents already practicing agnosticism, what rebellion was there but to join a superchurch? If parents decided to "split," why not find a "true family" (as the Reverend Moon calls his church) or a "dad" like Jim Jones?

The American government has shown it cannot win wars the way it used to. People thought it knew how to run a prosperous economy, but their confidence is badly shaken. People once believed that Wall Street, the CIA, the FBI or the "establishment" was managing everything in secret conspiracy, but now all the veils have been pulled and it seems that no one at all is at the controls, not even the Wizard of Oz.

Symbolically, the reliability of traditional authority came into question in Dallas 15 years ago. Somebody shot our president. We couldn't keep the assassin alive long enough to find out whether he acted alone or with somebody else. We all saw Oswald killed on TV, and we've insisted that TV take us every other place thereafter. It took us to Vietnam, and when we didn't like what we saw, we threw the president out. The next president we picked turned out to be a crook, and we expelled him. This one? It's too soon to tell whether or not we've made another mistake.

It is little wonder that several million Americans have been attracted to groups whose leaders provide total authority, because there has been so little of the regular kind in the United States this past decade and a half. Nine hundred followed their leader to horrible deaths, and I think it does involve us all.

Morton Kondracke

Is Jimmy Carter losing faith?

The Plot Against Human Rights

An insidious campaign is afoot in Washington to dilute and, if possible, to destroy altogether President Carter's human rights policies in Latin America, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. The only element of these policies escaping the new onslaught is the question of human rights in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but the administration, for its own political reasons, has largely abandoned this campaign anyway in recent months.

Perhaps the saddest aspect of the current situation is that the president seems resigned to see his brave human rights initiative go down the drain—even though occasional rhetoric on the subject still emanates from the White House—rather than to confront powerful economic interests in the United States opposing the broad sweep of humanitarian policies.

Sadly, the Carter administration is quietly disengaging from its worldwide advocacy of human rights just as this policy is beginning to show serious results. Repressive governments, particularly in Latin America, have been making grudging concessions to the cause of human rights, and it can probably be argued that new tendencies toward redemocratization in the Hemisphere—Peru being a good example—have been reinforced by the early Carter pressures. Similarly, it is quite likely that Cuban president Fidel Castro decided in November to release thousands of political prisoners in order to remove one of the principal obstacles to improved relations with the United States, in which he is clearly interested, and to erase his image as a violator of human rights. In this, Castro appears to have beaten Mr. Carter at his own game, and, at the same time, to have gained points with liberal opinion in both the United States and Latin America.

To judge from recent wall posters and newspaper editorials in Peking, even the Chinese leadership, seemingly caught again in a major power struggle, is borrowing from the Carter vocabulary to claim that the defense of human rights must not be allowed to remain a "bourgeois slogan."

The principal reason for the efforts to torpedo the human rights policy is annoyance on the part of much of the United States business community, including defense contractors, that the restrictive Carter guidelines on assistance to dictatorial regimes are costing them millions of dollars in sales. United States military sales to Latin American countries have been suspended because of human rights violations, although this standard does not fully apply to such "strategic" countries as Iran, the Philippines or South Korea. The inconsistency of the Carter policies in this area, dictated by pragmatic considerations, is a separate aspect of the larger problem.

Because of the administration's human rights posture, the Export-Import Bank has been refusing to provide export loans and guarantees to American manufacturers of industrial products with markets in countries like Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. American representatives in the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank have opposed development loans to dictatorial countries. Thus the concentrated businessmen's attack on the human rights policy.

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The campaign scored its first success early in November when the administration reversed itself and authorized the Export-Import Bank to finance the export of turbines for a hydroelectric power project in Argentina, a country where, in the judgment of at least the State Department, human rights violations are quite flagrant. After this first major breach in the policy of restrictions, chances are that the administration will submit more and more to the pressures of the business community in its approach to human rights. White House aides have been in favor of such "flexibility" even though groups in the State Department are fighting a rear-guard action.

One of the arguments used by detractors of human rights policies is that these policies triggered the current rebellions in Nicaragua and Iran, possibly aiding leftist causes and jeopardizing United States strategic interests.

This is arrant nonsense, but it has made some impression in the Congress and elsewhere. The Carter proclamations of dedication to the observance of human rights have, unquestionably, pushed the Iranian regime to eliminate some of the abuses of the SAVAK secret police and led the Nicaraguan dictatorship to rhetorical concessions to democratic ideals, but Washington's verbiage is not responsible for the remaining discontents.

All of this is really too bad for the United States. The human rights policy, far from perfect or even consistent, was the only serious international expression of moral concern by the Carter administration. It sought to make the point that the United States stands for more than a stable dollar and the best cruise missile that money can buy. But now "pragmatists" may be winning the day, though their victory, in the long run, is certain to endanger American influence in much of the third world and elsewhere. This would be one more demonstration of how credible Jimmy Carter really is in foreign policy.

Tad Szulc

The milk industry is a sick patient that pays lavishly to avoid treatment.

Calling Dr. Kahn

Nobody dispenses the mother's milk of politics more effectively than the dairy industry, whose Washington lobbying organization, the National Milk Producers Federation, just concluded its annual meeting in Seattle. The large amounts of milk money that have lubricated American politics over the years have helped produce an industry that presents in exaggerated detail all the ills the new school of Washington deregulators are trying to cure by bracing doses of the free market. Like many American businessmen, dairymen may speak highly of the free market, but they have no great desire to experience it themselves. The milk producing business is characterized by massive government subsidies, monopolistic practices and high consumer prices. Milk is a logical target for Carter administration inflation doctor Alfred Kahn, the hero of airline deregulation.

Logical, perhaps, but unlikely. The dairy industry is too politically savvy. The federation consists of the major dairy farmer cooperatives, including the big four—Associated Milk Producers Inc. (AMPI), Mid-America Dairymen Inc., Dairymen Inc. and Milk Inc. Together those four account for nearly one quarter of US milk production. "Cooperative" has a nice ring to it, conjuring images of happy farmers working in unison toward the betterment of all. But a better word for the big dairy co-ops is "monopoly." The co-ops tend to dominate local markets so that in a given region, one cooperative may control 80 percent of production or more. That means monopoly power and the co-ops use it.

The dairy cooperatives have little to fear from Washington trust-busters or born again deregulators. The 1922 Capper-Volstead Act permits farmers to set up cooperatives without fear of the antitrust statutes, while ordering the secretary of agriculture to police them if they appear to turn into monopolies. Despite clear evidence of monopoly practices in recent years, no secretary of agriculture has ever taken action. The other arms of antitrust enforcement aren't much stronger. The Federal Trade Commission is so unsure of the legal issues that it won't act. Sporadic action against the co-ops by the Justice Department has had no effect on market structure.

Given the generosity of the dairy industry, Washington's supine attitude is understandable. AMPI was the ninth largest campaign contributor in the 1978 elections, according to the Federal Election Commission figures. According to Common Cause, in 1976 the dairy industry was outspent only by the American Medical Association—$1.8 million to $1.4 million. That put the milk lobby ahead of such traditional big spenders as the AFL-CIO and the oil industry.

The dairy industry favors both Republicans and Democrats with its money. The test is narrowly self-interested: does the candidate see the world the same way the dairymen see it? That world view consists of high subsidies, low competition, and an easy attitude toward antitrust enforcement. In 1971 AMPI offered two million dollars to the Republican party in return for a decision to increase milk support prices. The administration increased supports. The GOP got its money. Dairy ideologues gave Democratic party

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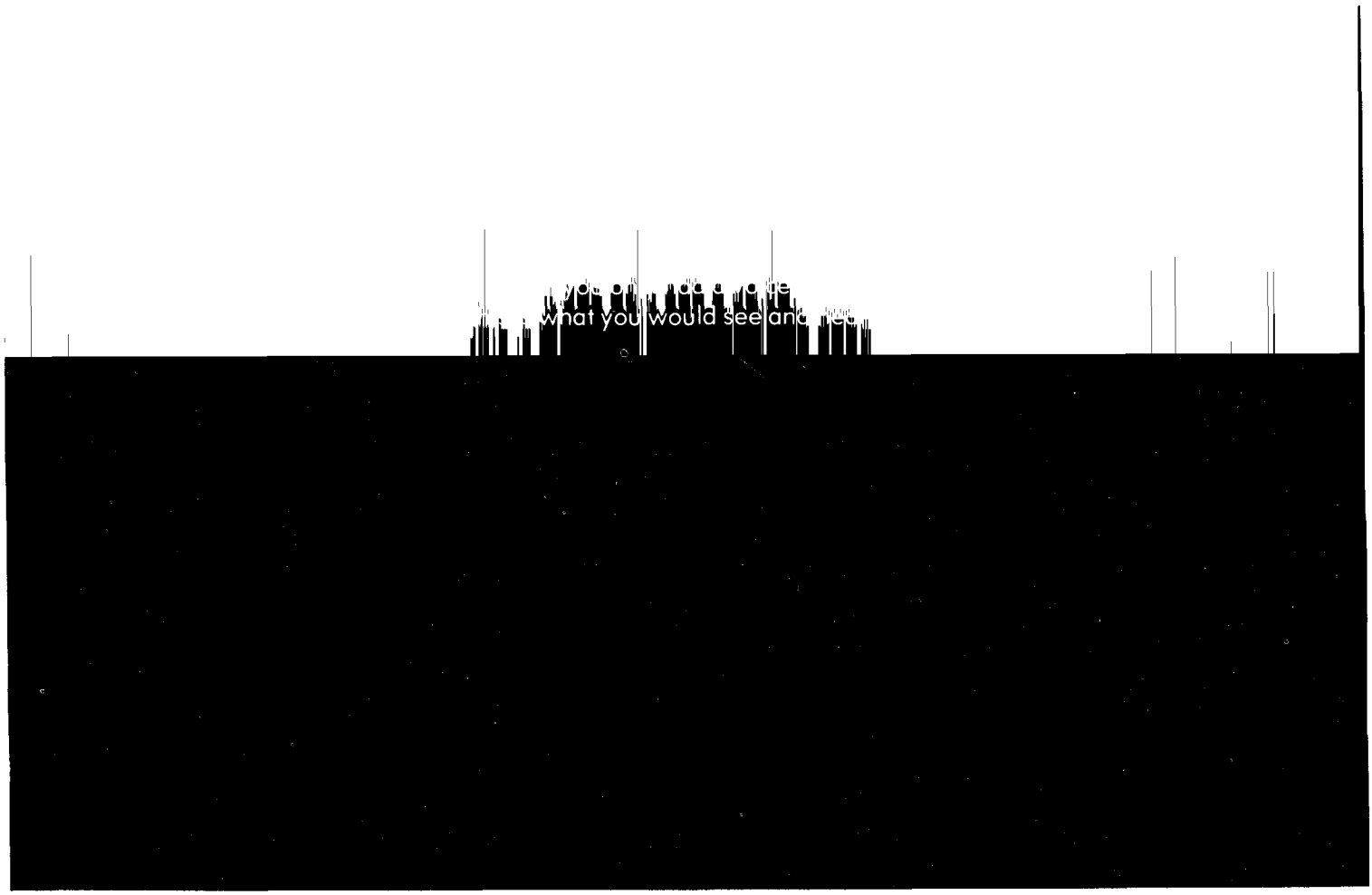

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organizations $224,000 in 1976. Jimmy Carter passed the milk test and got $11,000 for his primary campaigns. One of President Carter's early actions in 1977 was to raise milk support prices again, against the advice of his own Council on Wage and Price Stability ("Two Milk Duds," *TNR*, July 23, 1977). In fact, milk price supports have gone up three times in Carter's two years in office. The most recent increase was last October, and another increase is scheduled for April 1. Most analysts conclude that higher supports translate into higher consumer prices for dairy products on about a penny-for-penny basis.

Jimmy Carter is unpopular with most people in farm country. The grain farmers who drove tractors down the broad Washington boulevards last winter remain unhappy. Cattle producers are upset about Carter's veto of a bill that would have restricted meat imports, despite the highest meat prices in years. But dairy farmers are generally happy with this administration whose dedication to fighting inflation doesn't extend to their corner of the economy.

Government aid to dairying is extraordinarily complicated and virtually complete. The government offers dairymen the equivalent of cradle to grave protection with no significant aspect of the business left to the uncertainties of the market. The first element in the political economy of milk is the federal milk marketing order. A milk order is simply a regulation issued by the secretary of agriculture naming a geographic region of the country and setting minimum prices that farmers will receive and dairies will pay for raw grade A milk in that region. At last count there were 52 different regions covered by federal milk market orders. The market order for each region is slightly different to account for local conditions, and is administered by a local "market administrator," a federal employee. Milk market orders establish minimum prices for grade A milk at both wholesale and retail levels. As a side effect, they encourage farmers to produce more grade A milk than the market needs. The surplus gets channeled into what the industry calls the "manufactured milk market"—milk for making cheese, yogurt and the like.

This market, too, is regulated. The mechanism is the milk price support program. The Commodity Credit Corporation purchases manufactured dairy products in order to prop up prices on this market, which would be depressed by the large amounts of surplus grade A milk coming in as a result of the effect of the market orders. Grade B milk—which can only be used for manufacturing and not for drinking—is unregulated, but grade A and B milk are interchangeable in manufacturing, though grade B costs a farmer somewhat less to produce. Without all this interference and manipulation, only enough grade A milk would be produced to supply the drinking market. Grade B would supply the cheese market. And prices would be relatively stable—and lower—in both.

But the influx of grade A milk in the second market pushes prices for cheese down. Support prices then come into play to keep them from falling very far. A support level is established as a percentage of the parity price—a concept loosely tied to production costs plus a healthy profit and defined in detail in the law. The political battles get fought over what percentage of parity the government will support. The support price has risen from $3.15 per hundred pounds of milk in 1964 to $9.87 currently—80 percent of parity. When Jimmy Carter took office, the support price was $8.26. When the price falls, the CCC buys the amount of dairy products necessary to push prices back up. It is common for the government to buy five percent or more of total US milk production during a year to prop up prices.

This intricate economic system produces some interesting and unfortunate social results. Predictably, high priced milk means lower consumption. Per capita consumption of milk and cream has dropped from 302 pounds in 1965 to 244 pounds in 1974. During that time market order prices rose from under five dollars a hundredweight to over nine dollars, with consumer prices following closely behind. Walter McNamara, a lawyer writing a book about the milk industry, says, "The system does a good job of keeping this dangerous substance out of reach of our helpless children." The current system also results in overproduction of manufactured dairy products, subsidizing cheese consumers—increasingly the fast food industry—at the expense of milk drinkers. Cheese consumption goes up while milk consumption goes down.

And then there are consumer prices. "A final effect of the order system, in conjunction with the price support program," a Justice Department study concluded in 1975, "is to elevate the general price level for dairy products, thus increasing the cost to consumers."

The political economy of milk also has some unintended effects on the people who produce and sell milk. Because the system pushes a farmer toward Grade A milk production, which is more expensive, it pushes him toward bigness. And because the system

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forces overproduction of milk, the system again mandates increasing size. In 1970 there were 648,000 dairy farms. Dairy economists are predicting that the number may be down to around 400,000 by spring. But production has increased over the years (even as consumption goes down), meaning that the fewer farms are getting bigger and bigger. The dairy lobby tries to explain the fall in the number of farms as a consequence of bad times—prices too low, costs too high, and all the usual commercial tales of woe. But no evidence supports that assertion, and the explanation that the current regulatory mess is the engine driving the industry toward concentration is much more persuasive.

The market order system also drives the co-ops toward local and regional monopolies. Donald Randall, general counsel of the National Association for Milk Marketing Reform, charges that the cooperatives have so much power that they artificially push the price of milk above the already artificially high market order price, by imposing "so-called 'premiums' representing the additional charges for milk above the federal order prices." Randall's association is a group of milk handlers—dairies—who pass on the high cost of the raw milk to consumers through higher retail prices. Randall says, "While national dairy mergers in the 1960s were halted by the FTC, co-ops continue their mergers, having almost doubled their fluid milk market share between 1964 and 1978."

The growth in co-op monopolies flows logically from the milk market order system, which inhibits movement of milk from one marketing order area to another in response to demand. "Some cooperatives," the Justice Department concluded, "making generous use of their Capper-Volstead exemption and the federal order system, have achieved and exercised monopoly power. Without the federal system, none of this would likely have occurred and certainly would not have been allowed to persist."

What can be done about this regulatory nightmare called the milk business? In its 1975 study, the Justice Department suggested several steps to begin moving the industry toward economic sanity. The comprehensive study by lawyers and economists in the Antitrust Division suggested "phased deregulation of milk marketing," meaning gradually moving away from the stratified federal order system while creating a price support mechanism to cushion farmers against the shocks of deregulation. Combined with that approach should be antitrust action against monopoly co-ops through enforcement of the Capper-Volstead protections.

But a detailed discussion of remedies isn't really very fruitful because a remedy frankly isn't politically feasible. The Justice Department study has been shelved, an inconvenient reminder of a prior administration's zeal for regulatory reform. Insiders say they see little interest in deregulating milk from the White House or either House of Congress. The milk lobby finds itself in a pleasant situation, with friends in the White House, friends in Congress and a milk pail full of IOUs from the 1976 and 1978 elections.

Kennedy P. Maize

Kennedy P. Maize covers agriculture for Editorial Research Reports, a subsidiary of *Congressional Quarterly*.

A year-end review of wasted thought.

Ideas Whose Time Has Come and Gone

During the early months of this year, the newspapers and, perhaps even more so, the serious journals were full of stories about the dangers of Eurocommunism. The threat was said to be immediate and pervasive: Eurocommunism would settle over the continent sometime late tomorrow afternoon. To the Kremlin watchers and the China watchers were now added the Eurocommunism watchers. Some articles, such as a notorious one that professed to have discovered a phenomenon known as Anglocommunism, were hysterical. It all reminded me of the schoolboy joke in Britain before the war: that Neville Chamberlain took his weekends in the country, but Hitler took his countries in the weekends. It was all going to be like that again. . . . But when did we last read an article about Eurocommunism? The subject has evaporated. This is not because certain events happened which "defeated" Eurocommunism, but simply because there was no such phenomenon there in the first place. It was one of those balloons that grows from the heads of the mostly underemployed commentators who inhabit that gray world of the universities, institutes, and the media that quaintly gathers them to itself as experts.

Another idea that ballooned this year, and has evaporated even more quickly, is that of a tax revolt that is "sweeping" the country. (These ideas are always said to be sweeping a country or a continent, as if there is never any body of resistance to them, including the usually reliable resistance of the sheer inertia of the people.) As the governor of Virginia wisely told his fellow Republicans last week, their gains at the elections last month were modest because they took the tax revolt for granted. Let us put it this way. If the radical measures implicit in a tax revolt were taken, it would mean a drastic upheaval in people's personal lives and the arrangements of society. Therefore if the country really is in a conservative mood, the last thing

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that it will support is a tax revolt. This may be good or bad, but undeniably it is true. Yet the mostly underemployed commentators—this time on the domestic front—were all too eager to see a great rebellion in the west. Even as it petered out before their eyes—before the elections—they still traced its progress across the country.

The political life of a nation is governed far more by ideas than we usually acknowledge. We fix our eyes on day-to-day events and on public figures—they seem to be real—and of course on the socioeconomic background to politics. But ideas are the engine. Even the most inarticulate can grasp an idea—they do it all too voraciously—and then spew it forth as their own with their own energy. It may not be their motive, but it is their motor. But ideas are things of such phantasmagoria, constantly shifting, kaleidoscopic, even with something of the character of optical illusions, that we should touch them first, turn them over, with the longest pair of tongs we can find.

In the past few years, our politics has been affected, always for the worse, by such ideas, which the largely underemployed commentators have clasped to their bosoms—something new to write about, a trend to uncover—and always in the end they have opened their hands to find nothing, not even a few faded petals, only a smell of musk. But undaunted they will find a new idea, the day after tomorrow, that is sweeping the country, or a continent, or for that matter the world.

Do you remember the time of "polarization"? The voters were polarized. The country was polarized. This idea had a fairly long run, for so flimsy a construction, from the late 1960s to the election of 1972. Out went the intrepid reporters into the land, to find what was vexing the people. I call this the "Andrew Wyeth" school of reporting. The stories always began in the same way. "Joe Bonehead leaned against his barn in southern Illinois. He stooped and picked up some of the black earth, and let it trickle through his fingers. 'I and Mrs. Bonehead, we're not voting this year.' Why not? Joe sucked a straw. 'Mrs. Bonehead and I, we're polarized.' Mrs. Bonehead came up, carrying a pail of milk. She did not have to be asked. 'We're polarized this year,' she said, 'so we're not voting.' One hears the same all across the country." But whatever afflicted the American people at the time, the one thing that is clear now is that they were not polarized, not so set apart that they had ceased to know or be able to talk to each other.

Then there came 1976. The idea of polarization would not run again. This did not unnerve the Andrew Wyeth school of reporters. Out they went again to feel the pulse of America. "Joe Hardknutt leaned against one of the pumps in his gas station." (Why are the people they interview always leaning against their barns or their gas stations? If they are worth interviewing, shouldn't they be doing something useful, contributing to the social welfare, like jogging or reading *People*?) "'Mrs. Hardknutt and I aren't voting this year. We're alienated. If you're alienated, you know, you don't vote. Not Mrs. Hardknutt and me, at any rate.'" In a trice, it was said everywhere. 1976 was the year of the alienated voter. It is here in the realm of ideas, where ideas are supposed to be what really moves people, that the commentators most reflect Eugene McCarthy's famous image of them: they are like blackbirds sitting on a telephone wire and, when one takes off and flies to another wire, they all lift their wings and fly after it.

Running alongside the idea of polarization and, to some extent, that of alienation as well, was the idea of the white backlash. I used to sit, during those George Wallace years, waiting for the crack of the backlash. After all, a backlash implies a violent movement, if anything. But never did it come. This underlines the danger of such make-believe ideas. There has been no backlash, and this has made it more difficult to notice what *was* happening: the slow creeping of neglect among the whites. The issues and the voting in this year's elections were, in fact, the "benign neglect" of Daniel Patrick Moynihan made respectable by the ballot. Because there has been no backlash, because after the turmoil of the 1960s here is "This Peaceable Kingdom" of the comfortably off, we are slow to realize how the racial minorities and the poor have been shunted once more out of sight. The poor are always with us; but invisible again, thank the Lord!

Except in a few localities, the blacks were simply nowhere in November. The election was not about them. This is acceptable to us because we are dumbly grateful that the threats of polarization and the backlash have come to nothing. But if we understood that neither polarization nor the backlash were ever genuine ideas, we would see much more clearly how insidiously we have slipped back. I think that it was either Josh Billings or Artemus Ward—now tell me that it was Mr. Dooley—who said: "Think always of the poor; it will cost you nothing." That is very much the stage to which we have returned, and a great deal of the blame lies on those who charge the political discourse with large and overexcited ideas, whose dreadful consequences we then congratulate ourselves for escaping. To maintain the comfortable whites' interest in those less fortunate needed a much steadier and more prosaic apprehension of what was going on than polarization or the backlash.

Turning back to the idea of alienation, it is dangerous to introduce so loose a concept, one that can generate so much self-indulgence, into the day-to-day workings of politics. Alienation is one of those theological terms—charisma is another—sociologists have seized upon. I myself believe that the penetrating social message of Marx has been diluted by the discovery of his early writings about alienation. Such an idea all too easily turns a genuinely social protest into a merely personal

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disgruntlement, and to no one's disgruntlement does it give more support than to the comfortably well off who then retreat into their private enclaves of self-absorption and self-actualization.

Yet it was out of the popularized ideas of alienation and even of existentialism that the "new politics" of the late 1960s and early 1970s was born. The shivering of every lance of the "new politics," the futile and discreditable end to which it has so quickly come, even now culminating, if one wishes to be so harsh, in the jungles of Guyana, has its explanation here. It is foolish—and if it were not only foolish, it would be malign—to gaze at the largely civil and tolerant society of America, and try to encompass its vexations in so trite an idea as alienation has become. But these ideas are splashed, not merely into the columns which not many people read, but into the news pages where reporters attempt the theses they never wrote at college.

To return to Europe. The idea that there is or could be such a thing as Anglocommunism is associated with the further idea that Britain is, like the Gadarene swine, on a precipitate decline from which it will not and can never hope to recover. But in fact Britain is doing rather well at the moment, and not because of oil in the North Sea, and the much maligned unions are cooperating in wage and price guidelines that are effective. Quite apart from that, as an American friend once said to me, "The English can never be down for long. If they find they are losing, they merely change the rules. When their agriculture ceased to be competitive, they invented the industrial revolution. When they found that Europe always beat their armies, they said that only navies won wars." It is not all a piece of nonsense. It is just as tenable an idea as any that is based on grovelling among statistics of the GNP.

But the idea of Anglocommunism remains dazzling to the mind. "What are the Communists supposed to take over?" a wise Englishman asked me. "The Civil Service? The Armed Services? The Monarchy? The House of Commons? Perhaps they might take over the BBC for a week or two—it's always been flabby—but people would simply stop believing the BBC." Not only is it inconceivable that the Communists could take over Britain; it is inconceivable that the right-wing vigilantes could do so either. Yet one has only to put "-ism" on to a word, and people seem to become so gullible as to be out of character. Change "Anglocommunism" to "Anglocommunists," and one starts to number them off. Six? Twelve? And even they are not altogether serious in their professions of faith. Let someone try to run an article on Anglocommunism now. It would be laughed out of court. It is another idea, once trumpeted, that has evaporated.

If there was ever a threat of Eurocommunism, it was said to hold two dangers: first, that the European Communist parties would win elections and, second, that if they did they would reveal their submission to Moscow. The second of these ideas simply flies in the face of all we know of the human nature of politicians. If ever they did gain power, they would not endanger it by submitting to Moscow. One also has to ask, even if a little less certainly than of Britain, what they would take over. Europe is not in the 1930s, for either Communists or Fascists. As for the first proposition, one has to ask in today's circumstances, what is power? The complexities of the international economy, and no less of strategy, again make Italy and even France very different from the way they were in the 1930s. The countries of Europe are just not there to be taken over in that way. It can be said that we hear little of Eurocommunism now, after the flurry at the beginning of the year, because the Eurocommunists were defeated. (Actually in France they secured their object: they defeated the democratic left.) But if there had not been a Moro kidnapping, there would have been some other event, which would have let it be said that they were a real danger, but that luckily they were defeated. There is a more tenable view: there was never a real threat at all.

It should not have to be said that I believe that Russia is a threat to world peace and to the independence of many countries if it is allowed to turn the key in the lock. But to carry one's apprehensions about Russia into a total misreading both of Europe's historical sense of itself, and of the profound changes that have been wrought in it since 1945, is the kind of stupidity of which only mostly underemployed commentators are capable, as they fantasize about great ideas and great movements of history. There is something petty and dangerously misleading in thinking that Europe is now there for the taking, as for various precise historical reasons it was there for Hitler in the 1930s. The idea of Eurocommunism has disappeared, not because it was defeated, but because it was not there in the first place.

Consider one fact. The most obvious potential threat to Europe in the near future is that the Russians may intervene in Yugoslavia after Tito's death. One assumes that America would then find its will, and retaliate with the force needed. But then think of this. America would in its own interests, and those of the West as a whole, be defending the one genuinely Eurocommunist country on the continent. But we are told that Eurocommunism is in league with Russia. Alas, the confusion! Someone once said that art had to keep at least a tenuous connection with life. Ideas have to keep at least a tenuous connection with reality. We have become victims of ideas that float in their own atmosphere. One cannot even shoot them down. They are the UFOs of political debate now. People claim to have seen them; none can ever really describe them; they leave no trace when they leave. Eurocommunism . . . polarization . . . alienation . . . backlash . . . What's next?

Henry Fairlie

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Arts and Lives

Stanley Kauffmann on films

Notes Along the Way

"I've heard for the last 30 or 40 years that there's a motion picture crisis," said Maurice Bessy, then director of the Cannes Film Festival, in 1976. "But now there is no crisis. The motion picture is dying. Like other art forms throughout history, it will simply die out."

That statement was probably premature, but I'm glad it was made. It provides a reference point, a position, for the despair that frequently recurs in anyone concerned with the well-being and future of film. The statement has different uses. We can console ourselves with the inevitability of it when feeling low; or determinedly rebound from it; or, when a good new film comes along, soar above it. But at least it's always there, like the immanence of Hell to help the religious live well.

Anyway we always expect the impossible of film. There's a story about Brahms, who didn't write the first of his four symphonies until he was 42, meeting the prolific Bruckner one day on the street in Vienna and saying, "Well, Bruckner, how are you? And how many symphonies this week?" We constantly address the screen saying: "How many masterpieces this week?" A week without an immortal new work is a bad week for a filmgoer, especially a film critic. (Some critics are continually trying to fill the gap with value inflation.) It's a fault born of enthusiasm, still it's unreasonable. When we look back in any art, we see the peaks, and we forget the spaces between the peaks. In film that mistake is more prevalent because the art is so young that the peaks are closer together and the dips, deep as they are, more shadowed; and because there have been periods in the film's brief history of sheer high astonishment—for instance, the foreign films of about 1958-68. But let us—I won't say be reasonable—at least understand that we are being unreasonable. Any year in the theater that produces one first-rate play is an extraordinary year in theater history, yet we keep chattering about good and bad seasons as if anything less than a flow of first-rate plays was a shock. Our expectations about film are more insistent, since film is more widely seen and has, in the past few decades, given us more good works than have dramatists. Still it's a bit silly, this easily tapped despair, in the light of the data on creativity.

On the other hand again, it's a compliment to the art. Few people are greatly disappointed if a musical year doesn't produce at least one fine new opera, because few people believe that fine new operas have been written since Alban Berg. (And I've seen the recent production of Weill's *Street Scene*.) But we keep expecting constant greatness from the film. We keep saying to the screen, "Yes, but what have you done for me lately?" We demand the impossible as a matter of course.

Out of this perhaps endearing unreasonableness grows a really irritating platitude. Over and over, one hears: "All this talk about the art of the film, but what is there to *see*?" The line always means, "What new film is there to see?" The literary equivalent would be, "All this talk about literature, but what novel published this month is deathless?" In New York City there are at least six theaters, plus museums, universities, and institutions, that run revivals: the theaters usually have double bills and change the bills more than once a week, so that on any given night there is a small "library" of past films to choose from. Anyone who can't find one film among them that's worth seeing or re-seeing isn't much interested.

Outside New York or other cities with similar facilities, the problem is almost as easily soluble. Any group of people can get together and buy or rent a 16-mm projector and rent a film a week. For a dozen people—never mind a Film Society, just a dozen friends—the cost per week would average out at the cost of a ticket to a first-run film, more if the rented picture is recent, very much less if it's older. The catalogues of the 16-mm rental companies will last out several lifetimes. The cross-catalogue of all those catalogues—the way to find out whether a particular film is available and which company rents it—is *Feature Films on 8 mm and 16 mm*, edited by James L. Limbacher, 5th edition (Bowker; $19.95).

Apropos of the State of the Art: the Canadian film magazine *Take One* published a poll (July 1978) of 20 critics from several countries about the decade from January 1968 through December 1977—the 10 "best" from the US, 10 from Europe, five from the third world. (Japan was included under Europe, India under third world. Go figure.) I responded on the understanding that these were not "best" but some favorites: I could easily have listed different favorites, including more than one by some of the same directors. In case you're interested, here are my lists, done alphabetically. US: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind, The Conversation, Desperate Characters, Harlan County, USA, The Hired Hand, Midnight Cowboy, Mikey and Nicky, Payday, Wanda, The Wild Bunch.* European: *Amarcord, The*

(continued on page 36)

Films Worth Seeing

Autumn Sonata. Ingmar Bergman's best since *The Passion of Anna*—a mother-daughter collision, with powerful performances by Ingrid Bergman and Liv Ullmann.

Girlfriends. The kind of independent US film that many try for, few make. Claudia Weill's truth about young New York women.

Go Tell the Spartans. Go try to find it. Spottily distributed film about Vietnam 1964. The best so far on the subject.

The Wiz. No, not Diana Ross, not the slushy lyrics, but the talent of the others and the over-upholstered lavishness make a lot of it pleasant.

SK

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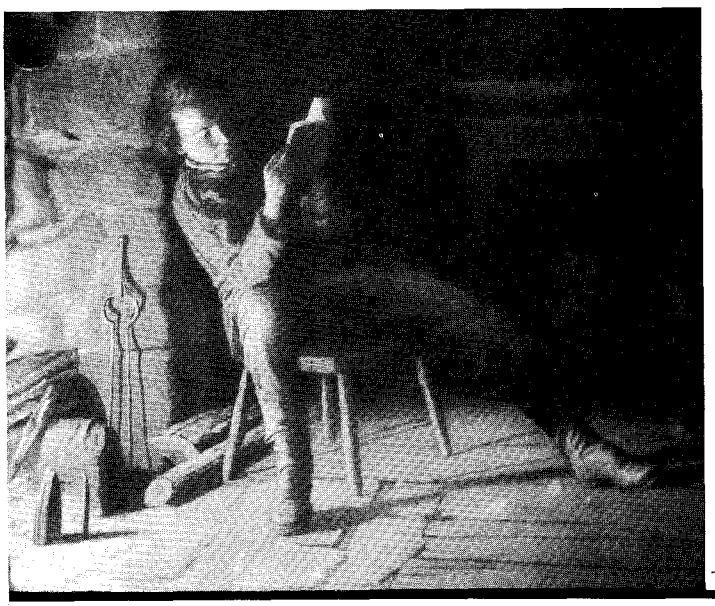

The Granger Collection

The Year's Books

(Part I)

John Canaday on art books

If this year's seasonal crop is a true indication, something wonderful happened to art book publishing in 1978—the coffee-table book died. Those overweight, opulently produced, expensive display pieces on subjects that contributed nothing to the field historically or critically while falsifying their subjects aesthetically with souped-up color reproductions may now be left where, lately, we have seen them languishing—on the humiliating remainders counters unsold at half price.

The new books are big, all right, and opulent, and they cost a packet, but they have reasons for being, even the one that rides in on the King Tut wave and yet another on a subject that you would think had been done to death—Michelangelo. It is impossible to choose a year's best from a group that includes these two books and other contenders on Roman art, Persian carpets, Ming porcelain and baroque architecture in addition to more modest runners-up.

In grab-bag order, then, rather than order of excellence:

The Gold of Tutankhamen by Arnold C. Brackman with a preface by William Kelly Simpson of Yale and Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, and an introduction by Kamal El Mallakh, of the Supreme Council of Archaeology of Egypt (you can't improve on those credentials) may owe its genesis to the current epidemic of Tut fever, but is otherwise unconnected with the exhibition that is stampeding the American public. Some of the objects illustrated in the 155 color plates are included in that show but all were photographed in the great museum in Cairo, and they leave you absolutely bedazzled. In addition to illuminating notes on the plates there is a book-length account of the tomb's discovery, illustrated with photographs taken during that long adventure. Publicity sheets on the book point out rather testily that no "new evidence" (their quotes) from material claimed to be privately held is incorporated with materials and conclusions corroborated by reputable scholars in the field—an unveiled crack at Thomas Hoving's current treatise. *The Gold of Tutankhamen*, published by Newsweek Books at the relatively low price of $49.95 until December 31 and $60 thereafter, is aimed at a popular audience and scores a bull's-eye. But the breathtaking presentation of precious objects makes it a worthy addition to the mass of Tut material rather than a repetition of a surefire subject.

Michelangelo is also surefire, and with my shelves already warping under a load of blockbusters I could only cry out "Oh, no, not again!" when first confronted by *Michelangelo: Painter, Sculptor, Architect* (Vendome Press, $35 to December 31, $40 thereafter) in spite of the reassuring name of the author, Howard Hibbard, a scholar as sound as they come. A preliminary skimming through the text brought on an attack of vicarious exhaustion at the thought of the labor involved in coordinating the mass of documentary, historical, and standard researched material that is the matrix of the book. But if Mr. Hibbard felt any such strain it doesn't show. Without romanticizing or other concessions to popularization, he writes as if the whole story were new. Even the stalest anecdotes are revivified to the running accompaniment of large, clear illustrations. You have to forgive radical inconsistencies in color, remembering that the Sistine ceiling is impossible to photograph accurately. (For instance, the figure of Adam from the Creation scene is a neutral gray-tan on one page, while a detail of the head on the facing page is all strong browns and pinks.) Things like that. You also run into typographical and editorial slips. But there are compensatory photographs of the sculpture, especially some unusual details, and if your Michelangelo shelf is full, you would do well to discard some of the others for this one.

The same advice goes for *The Art of Rome* by Bernard Andreae (Abrams, $85), an absolute whopper of a book with 900 illustrations that begin with a seductive historical sequence of 159 color plates including—I might as well go overboard here—the best photographs of sculpture that I have ever seen. It then carries you, firmly hooked, through a mass of documentary and archaeological material, with no loss of momentum. "Rome" here means the ancient Republic and Empire up into the fourth century. Art is inextricably interrelated with politics and other forces of social organization in the impressive text, as of course it was in ancient Rome to an exceptional degree. This is a wonderful book.

I suppose that Rizzoli knows what it is doing and expects to make money on *The Splendor of Persian Carpets* by Erwin Gans-Ruedin and *Ming Porcelain* by Daisy Lion-Goldschmidt, but even at the prices of

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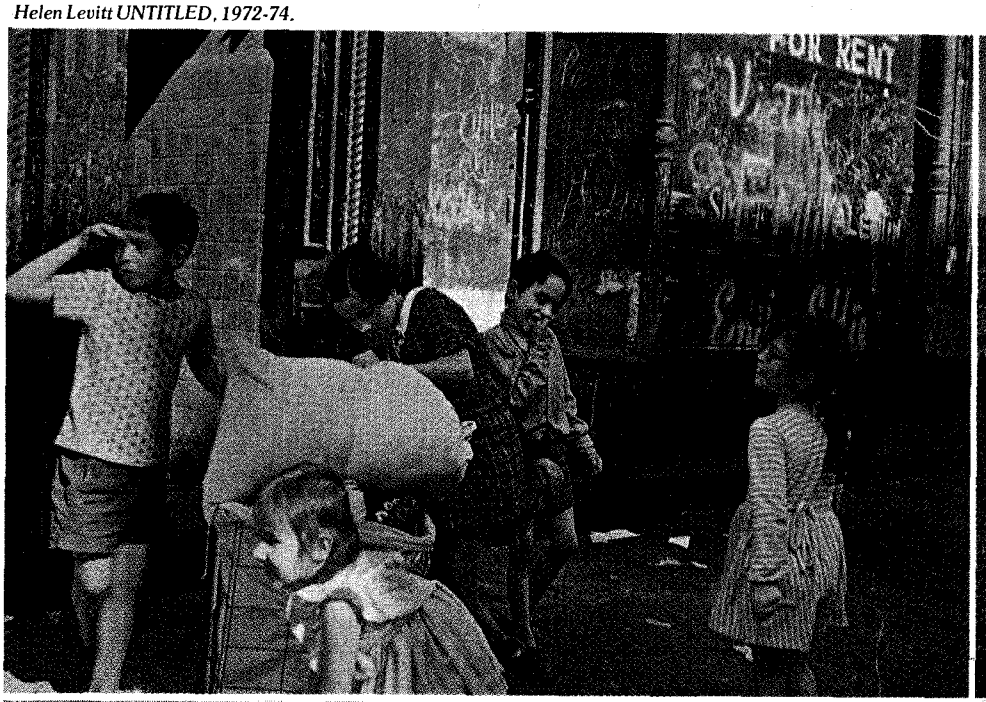
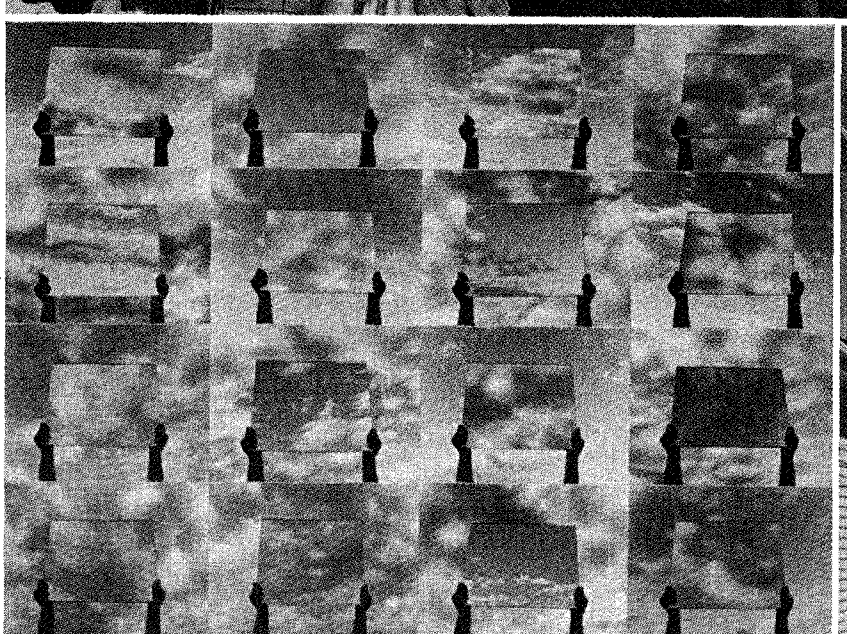
Some people
Some see

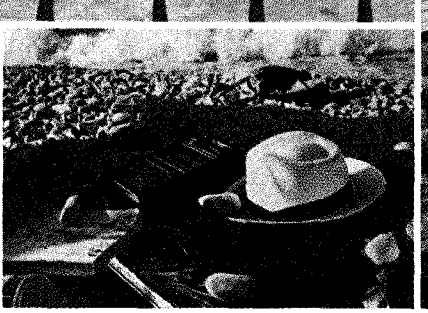
Helen Levitt UNTITLED, 1972-74.



William Eggleston MEMPHIS, c. 1971.

Gary Beydler TWENTY MINUTES IN APRIL, 1976.





Eve Sonneman SIGHT/SOUND: FOR MIKE GOLDBERG, SAMOS, GREECE, 1977.

Joel Meyerowitz UNTITLED, 1976.

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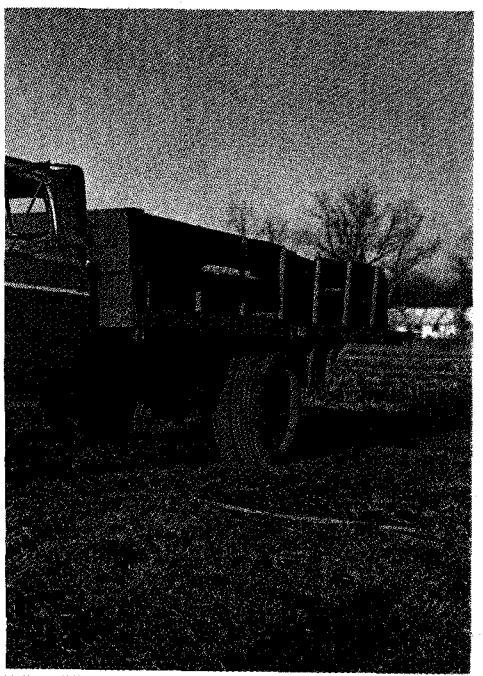
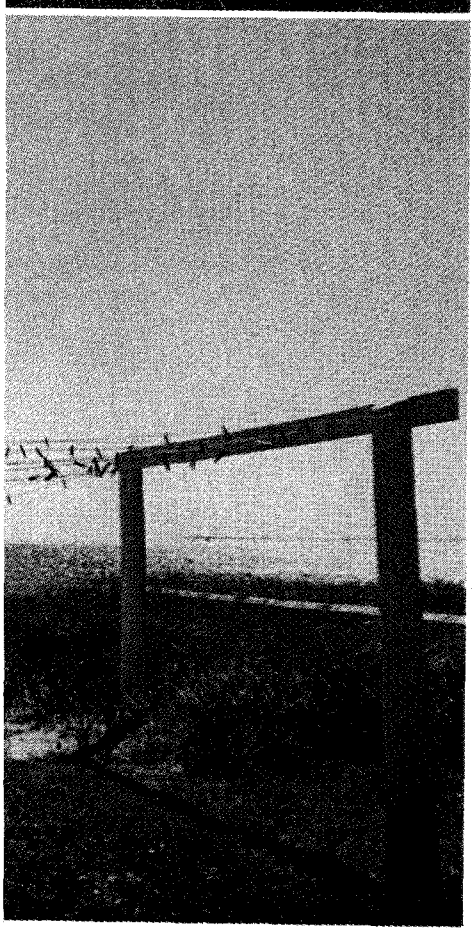
see the dream. the reality.





Snapshots. And posed shots. Pictures you can get lost in. And pictures you can find yourself in. We invite you to discover them for yourself in a stunning exhibition titled "Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960." It opened at The Museum of Modern Art and will be shown at other museums on the dates listed below.

We think you'll find, as in those at the left, not merely some evocation of the dreams and realities of the 60's and early 70's but something timeless and personal. Not merely what the photographer has seen, but what each of us sees for himself.

That's one reason we sponsored this exhibition, and why we think you'll find it rewarding. In our businesses and our lives, we need to see both the dream and the reality, and to discover something of each in everything we see. Sponsorship of art that reminds us of these things—and of the continuing need for individual insight—is not patronage. It's a business and human necessity.

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"Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960", an exhibition organized by The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., N.Y. Appeared there from July 28 to October 2, 1978. Subsequent showings include; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH Nov. 15, 1978 to Jan. 1, 1979; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN Jan. 29 to March 11, 1979; J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY Apr. 1 to May 15, 1979; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA June 7 to July 29, 1979; Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL Aug. 19 to Sept. 23, 1979; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA Nov. 13 to Dec. 23, 1979; Milwaukee Art Center, Milwaukee, WI Jan. 10 to March 2, 1980. The exhibition is made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and Philip Morris Incorporated.

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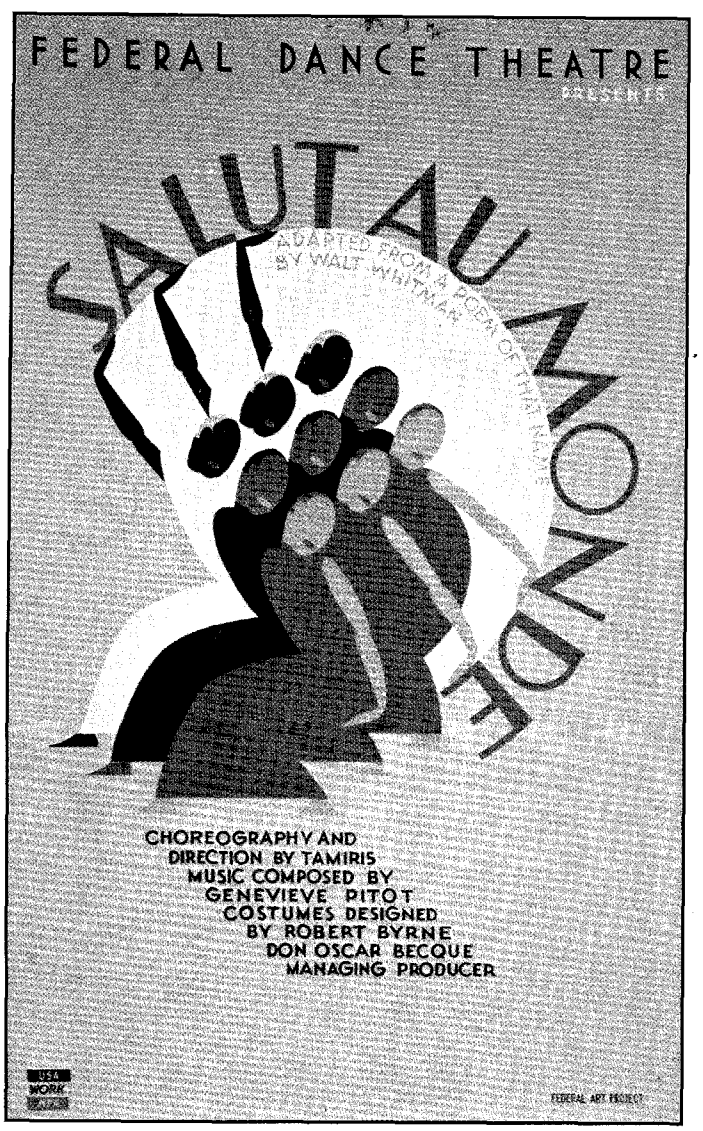
A Salute to the World of the Federal Theatre Project



"A treasure trove of a book, superbly printed . . . It consists of a lavishly illustrated history of the Federal Theatre in the Thirties. Full of fascinating oral history, playbills, lovely plates of scenic designs and costumes, many in color. The nostalgia buff and the theatre person will be taken with it." —DORIS GRUMBACH, *Saturday Review*

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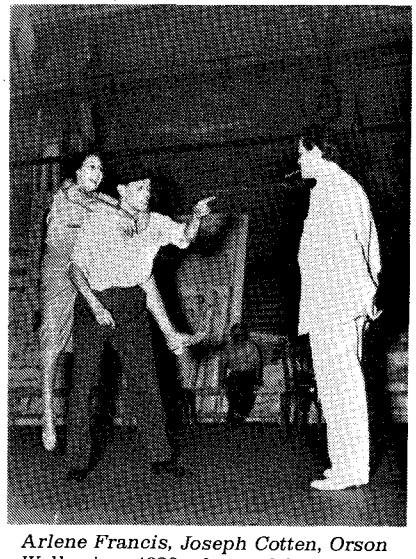
A stunning tribute to "the most exciting and tumultuous years (1935-39) in the American theatre"*

FREE, ADULT, UNCENSORED
The Living History of the Federal Theatre Project

Edited by John O'Connor and Lorraine Brown Foreword by JOHN HOUSEMAN

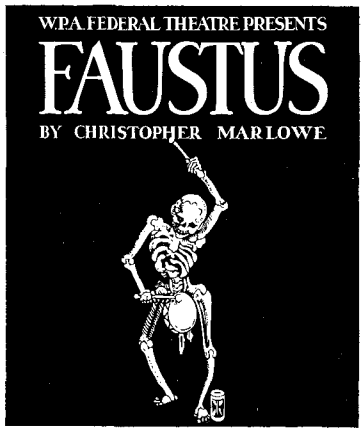
They were the glory years of American theatre history. With a pledge to perform "free, adult, uncensored" theatre, the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) of the Great Depression employed 12,000 artists and produced 830 stage plays and nearly 6000 radio plays. The names of those people whose careers were launched or established in the Federal Theatre read like a "who's who" of 20th century American stage and screen history, including:

Orson Welles
John Huston
Will Geer
Arlene Francis
E.G. Marshall
Burt Lancaster
Arthur Miller
John Houseman
Howard da Silva



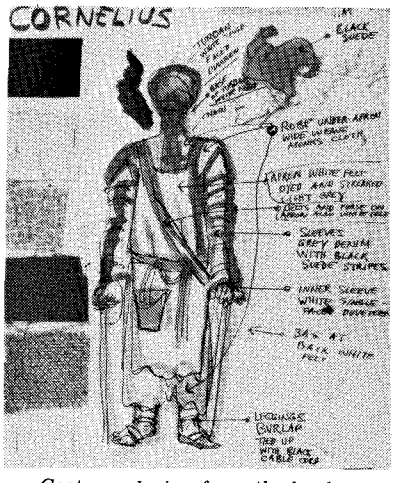
Arlene Francis, Joseph Cotten, Orson Welles in a 1936 rehearsal for "Horse Eats Hat"

Now, almost 40 years after the closing of the FTP, its voluminous files—production notebooks, newspaper clippings, poster art and set and costume designs—have at last been edited and reproduced in this stunningly illustrated history and scrapbook called **FREE, ADULT, UNCENSORED: The Living History of the Federal Theatre Project.**



Poster art from the book

Established as a relief agency in 1935 under the Works Progress Administration, the Federal Theatre dramatized the social, economic and cultural issues of the Depression. Under the tutelage of National Director Hallie Flanagan, it drew enthusiastic audiences to see the powerful "Living Newspaper" plays: incisive commentaries on poverty, labor unions, energy, housing, agriculture, unemployment and war. These "Living Newspaper" plays were the forerunners of today's television documentaries.



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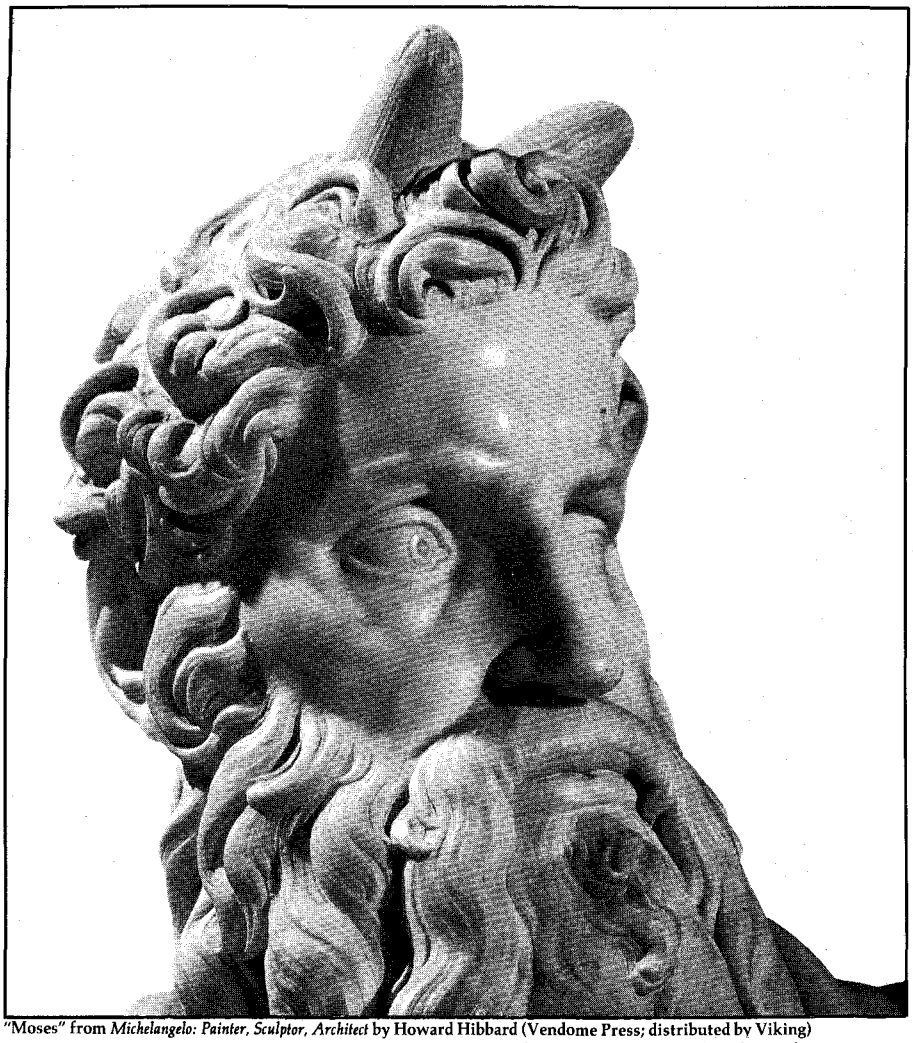

"Moses" from *Michelangelo: Painter, Sculptor, Architect* by Howard Hibbard (Vendome Press; distributed by Viking)

$85 and $100 respectively I'd say they were taking a chance on subjects with a limited audience, which makes me want to say "Thank you! Thank you!" *Persian Carpets* begins with a 5th-century-BC rug found preserved in ice by Russian archaeologists in 1949, and then jumps a couple of thousand years to the other earliest existing examples and goes on with 254 color illustrations to end in 1960. For a rug buff this beautiful book is inexhaustible, and the 20th-century examples show that in spite of the thousands of ugly modern imitations on sale everywhere this sophisticated folk art can still produce legitimate and beautiful continuations of its tradition—if you can find them.

The text of *Ming Porcelain* is by the curator of Chinese Art at the Musée Guimet, Paris's most neglected museum, but the examples are chosen from around the world, with American museums represented with an abundance that will surprise anyone accustomed to passing by the porcelain cases in Cleveland, Boston, Kansas City, Detroit, and the museums of half a dozen other cities where the excellence of the oriental collections can be a source of chauvinistic pride. The color plates in this book are so lovely that they evoke the tactile delight that experts take in handling porcelain. In their rarity, both these books induce a state of euphoria.

Baroque and Rococo: Architecture and Decoration (Harper & Row, $75.00) is no letdown. With its text by Alastair Laing, Christopher Tadgell, Kerry Downes and Anthony Blunt, who also served as editor, and its photographs by Wim Swaan, this book goes on my shelf side by side with *Leon Battista Alberti* by Franco Borsi (also Harper & Row, last year) and MIT's 1970 masterbook, *Roma Barocca* by Paolo Portoghesi, which means highest honors. Because sculpture and painting are fused with baroque and rococo architecture and decoration this is really a book on all three arts (although painting is a weak runner-up). Some of Wim Swaan's photographs of sculpture make me a little uneasy about what I said a few paragraphs back about the photographs of sculpture in the Roman book. Throughout this massive volume, the plates reveal baroque architecture as the visual spectacle that it is, while the texts clarify the social and philosophical bases of these histrionic styles. The book concludes with a nod toward Mexican and South American baroque, raising hopes for a sequel dealing properly with a field that so far has been treated only in patchy fashion. Patchy, at least, in comparison with this superbly coordinated achievement.

To call the following books runners-up is not quite fair, since they are all first-rate. But here goes:

Primitive Architecture, by Enrico Guidoni (Abrams, $37.50): From reed huts to mosques and minarets built of clay, from crude forest shelters to elaborate ceremonial houses fantastically carved and painted, from dugouts to entire villages of abstract sculptural forms, this book is full of surprises that make subsequent architecture seem monotonous in its conformity. The text treats primitive architecture from multiple points of view—from its structural methods to its expression of myth. The photographs of exotic spots and peoples make the book a kind of travelogue as well as architectural treatise. Quite wonderful.

Masterpieces of Primitive Art: The Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection, by Douglas Newton with photographs by Lee Boltin (Knopf, $30.00): Given the collection, the author and the photographer, you can hardly go wrong here. The examples are superb, the photographs both dramatic and respectful of the material, and the text so clear, so easy to read in the exposition of Mr. Newton's encyclopedic command of his subject, that the book can serve either as an introduction or an enlargement of the field, depending on where you stand.

The Arts of David Levine, foreword by Thomas S. Buechner (Knopf, $25.00): The plural in the title refers to the artist's two media, the pen and ink caricatures and his less well-known watercolors. It is wonderful to see the caricatures, usually reduced to the width of a magazine column, at full-page size. The precision of Levine's draftsmanship is a technical feat almost as interesting as his witty perception of personalities. Look carefully at the watercolors (well reproduced in this well-made book) and an equally precise control becomes apparent behind surface effects of spontaneity. Admirable.

Mexican Folk Toys, Festival Decoration and Ritual Objects, by Florence H. and Robert M. Pettit (Hastings House, $32.50): The arts in question are ephemeral for the double reason of the fragility of the objects themselves and the fatal anemia induced in folk arts by tourism. The authors have managed to collect some excellent examples and their loving text is supplemented by a calendar of

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festivals, fiestas and Indian market days when, if you are lucky, you may find a piece of genuine folk art tucked away in the mass of cheap manufactured goods.

The Icon, by Kurt Weitzmann (Braziller, $24.95 cloth, $11.95 paper): The paperback edition is the closest thing to a bargain that has turned up in arts books this year, with its 48 color plates of paintings, enamels, carvings and metal work—great works of art acceptably reproduced—and a brief, clear, scholarly introduction.

American Realism, by Francois Mathey (Rizzoli, $50.00): What a puzzler. I once saw Barrie's "The Old Woman Shows Her Medals" performed at the Comédie Francaise with three highfalutin French actresses trying to perform the roles of London charwomen and a fat, pale, middle-aged classical actor trying to impersonate the braw Scots soldier. This book, a French view of American realism (the author is Director of Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris) is something like that. Of the 152 examples of painting and sculpture (the other 18 are supplementary photographs), more than a third are of primitives, imposing a corresponding limitation and many omissions in more important fields. The whole thing, from an American point of view, is wildly unbalanced, awesomely distorted, and misinterpreted in a way possible only to the French, who, when you come down to it, think of cowboys as the only interesting Americans and forget that they have been parroting American culture ever since the 1920s when they adopted jazz, the cocktail, and Josephine Baker. This handsome book is a kind of unintentional document in comparative sociology that deserves an extended review but can't get it here.

In closing, if you want all these books, their combined price before December 31 is about $700 including tax, the way I figure it. And why not? You can't take it with you, as they say, and you can feast your eyes on these sumptuous books while you're still around.

Joyce Carol Oates on poetry

Never have so many written with such technical skill: this remark, as often an expression of frustration and dismay as of admiration, has become a commonplace of poetry criticism in the 1970s. Never, of course, have so many *written*. And published. And competed for a lamentably small audience: there are perhaps more *writers* than *readers* of poetry at the present time.

In so diminished a sphere the consequences have been, and continue to be, predictable. A few—a very few—poets are singled out to be honored, and again honored, and still again honored; it is as if only three or four poets of distinction were among us. Reviewers and critics echo one another, proclaiming Lowell and Dickey and Bishop and, more recently, Ashbery, no matter that their work is quite simply *not* superior to much that is being written today. Their reputations have been generously inflated (Bishop's and Ashbery's in particular) while gifted contemporaries of theirs pass by in relative neglect. Poets are often criticized for being bitterly jealous of one another, yet how are they to react when the same names are mentioned constantly, the same people singled out for awards? And the irresponsibility of well-intentioned critics: acclaiming Robert Lowell's flaccid, self-indulgent *Day By Day* and James Dickey's sharply disappointing (and largely derivative) *The Zodiac* in the most influential journals. In James Atlas's disturbing biography *Delmore Schwartz* the point is made that Schwartz was called a genius before his talent had developed; and after his precocious success, as his ability to control his poetry (and his life) deteriorated, editors and critics were still saying much the same things—as if they were no longer troubling to really read his work. Strident claims, though made with the best good will, have the inevitable consequence of alienating the general reader. In recent years poetry criticism has acquired some of the self-referential, self-serving and vaporous quality of contemporary art criticism; to the average intelligent reader it is frankly unintelligible. Superlatives and disparagements could very easily be switched from poet to poet, and probably no one, not even the poet, would notice.

If poetry at the present time lacks a wider audience, however, one cannot really blame irresponsible critics; nor can one blame poetry for its willfulness, its intractability, for poetry has always been "difficult." In reading the books under review, and innumerable others, I am struck by a common element of technical accomplishment that is 'sophisticated'—in the best sense of that word—and also by an appeal, a raw and almost frightening appeal, that the reader share in the deepest, most private intimacies of the poet's soul. If prose fiction employs metaphors to present, and perhaps dilute, emotion, poetry speaks directly and frankly of emotion. All poetry is confessional. The poet's self speaks to the reader's self, and though they are often separated by history, geography, and gender, there is no mistaking the pang, the shock, of kinship. I think it is simply the case that most readers, seeking entertainment (and even among serious readers of prose fiction it is often a kind of superior entertainment that is sought), draw back in alarm and something approaching embarrassment from the kinds of emotions, and even from the kinds of ideas, presented by such powerful and unsettling poets as Adrienne Rich, Robert Phillips, David Ignatow, and a number of others writing today. One does not always *want* to be as moved as, say, the reader of Adrienne Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language* (Norton; $9.95) will be.

And then there is the uneasy relationship between technique and what we might call content. Lyric poetry at its least skillful dissolves into a frail structure upon which, as on a lightweight aluminum rack, fragments of someone's "world" or "experience" have been carelessly hung. Language becomes simply a means, a mechanism, of recording the poet's drifting thoughts; or the poet fashions himself into an eye, an ear, a consciousness undifferentiated and unwilling to judge or impose order upon the external world. In Sandra McPherson's *The Year of Our Birth* (The Ecco Press; $6.95) beautifully-rendered poems with the lucidity of parables are set beside too many poems that read like facile exercises—virtuoso demonstrations of

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"leaping" images that might be traced back to, but cannot be blamed upon, Robert Bly's almost too celebrated essay, "Leaping Poetry and Dragon Smoke" (first published in his magazine *The Seventies*, in Spring 1972). Surrealism, whether Spanish, French, or midwestern always verges upon the sterile and flatly unconvincing—the poem is a machine (not as Valéry spoke of it: a machine for producing a certain poetic state of mind by means of language) composed of technical skills, devoid of psychological or philosophical content. Though Rich, Phillips, Ignatow and Mary Oliver are wonderfully diverse in their voices, and there is no legitimate "common language" among them, they do share the ability, rare and undefinable and yet unmistakable, to fuse content and style; they have managed—who knows with what taxing labor?—to make technique serve art.

Adrienne Rich has published eight books of poetry before *The Dream of a Common Language*, including her *Selected and New Poems 1950-1974;* and the highly controversial *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. She is also the author of what must be a masterpiece in the art of the essay, and certainly one of the finest essays on Emily Dickinson, "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson" (originally published in *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, 1977). Her early books—*The Diamond Cutters, Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*—were conspicuously *written* poems, elegantly crafted, bearing echoes of her elders' voices (elders who were all male) and exhibiting, rather like Sylvia Plath's *Colossus* poems, the passion of restraint, the beauty of a foot-binding era in poetry; they were certainly deserving of the praise they evoked from Auden and Jarrell and innumerable others.

Rich's more recent books, especially *The Will to Change* and *Diving Into the Wreck* (with that bewildering angry feminist outcry, "The Ninth Symphony of Beethoven Understood at Last as a Sexual Message") have been intensely personal, and intensely unsettling, expressions of many emotions—despair, rage, resignation, sensual fulfillment, joy. In "Transcendental Etude" (in the present volume) Rich speaks with contempt of virtuosity:

We aren't virtuosi
or child prodigies, there are no prodigies
in this realm, only a half-blind, stubborn
cleaving to the timbre, the tones of what we
are—
even when all the texts describe it
differently.

And we're not performers, like Liszt,
competing
against the world for speed and brilliance
(the 79-year-old pianist said, when I
asked her
What makes a virtuoso?—
Competitiveness.)
The longer I live the more I mistrust
theatricality, the false glamour cast
by performance. . . .

Rich's ambitions are many in *The Dream of a Common Language*, and it is a measure of her visionary energies that the majority of the poems succeed so powerfully. For her theme is not simply that of a contemplation of "the true nature of poetry" (which she sees as the drive to "connect," to find a common ground in our "acute particularity"—see "Origins and History of Consciousness"); it is also a violent rejection of the "patriarchal" culture and its assessments of women. Rich is not theatrical or self-pitying or coy; she is simply very angry. In one of the longer poems, "Natural Resources," she says bluntly: "I am tired of faintheartedness,/ their having to be *exceptional*/ to do what an ordinary woman/ does in the course of things/ I am tired of women stooping to half our height. . . ." In an elegiac poem to her sister, "Sibling Mysteries," she speaks of her estrangement not only from her sister but from their mother as well. The mother's flesh, the woman's flesh, is "made taboo" to women, who are delivered over to the masculine state, to be the possessions and servants of men. Remind me, Rich pleads, how beneath

the strange male bodies
we sank in terror or in resignation
and how we taught them tenderness—
. . . . . .

And how we ate and drank
their leavings, how we served them
in silence, how we told

among ourselves our secrets. . . .

how we dwelt in two worlds
the daughters and the mothers
in the kingdom of the sons

The *Twenty-One Love Poems* at the heart of the book are sonnet-like meditations on Rich's love for another woman, which is bound up passionately with her acceptance of herself as a woman. "The rules break like a thermometer, /quicksilver spills across the charted systems,/ we're out in a country that has no language/no laws" (XIII). She looks back upon an earlier self, a woman who cherished her suffering, now dead: "I am her descendant./I love the scar-tissue she handed on to me/but I want to go on from here with you/fighting the temptation to make a career of pain" (VIII). All of the poems are about women, and usually about women as victims, but the love poems transcend a narrowly feminist bias by focusing upon the ineffable consequences of love itself. Quite simply, "*The more I live the more I think/ two people together is a miracle.*" "Power," the first poem in the volume, is a meditation upon Marie Curie who, suffering from radiation sickness, refused to acknowledge the source of her agony. The analogy with the poet is a poignant one:

She died a famous woman
denying
her wounds
denying
her wounds came from the
same source as her power

There are, of course, weaker poems; occasionally there is a strained, rather desperate tone to Rich's voice, as if she were seeking to convince herself. Feminism is far more than a political attitude, it is a religious commitment as well. One must occasionally overstate in order to believe—

Something that kills us or leaves us half-alive
is raging under the name of an "act of god"
in Chad, in Niger, in the Upper Volta—
yes, that male god that acts on us and on our
children,
that male State that acts on us and on our
children
till our brains are blunted by
malnutrition. . . .

("Hunger")

Too often, as in the most strident poems of *Diving into the Wreck*, the human predicament itself—war, famine, loss, sorrow, aggression—is attributed to the "male god." Rich fantasizes in rhetoric that is not only unconvincing but unpoetic as well: "We shrink from touching/ our power/ . . . we're scared . . . / of what it could be to take and use our love,/ hose it on a city, on a

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world,/ to wield and guide its spray, destroying/ poisons, parasites, rats, viruses—/ like the terrible mothers we long and dread to be." Yet it is her belief that a "whole new poetry" will begin out of the recognition of sisterhood, and of the passionate love that only women can bear for women.

And here is Robert Phillips in his idiosyncratic, rather wildly inventive *The Pregnant Man* (Doubleday; $4.95)—by far the most imaginative of the books under review—speaking with a wry, sad humor of the sort of pregnancy a man must endure. "Afternoon in Public Landing" begins with the statement:

Being a man is harder
than being a woman, because

a man must deal with women.
A man is not the man he thinks

he is, only the man he is
in the eyes of a woman.

And in "The Tenant," in the fey disingenuous voice Phillips has mastered to disguise—but not entirely disguise—his genuine alarm and sorrow at the way love seems to have gone:

Feel
the world's largest foetus! See
the world's first pregnant man!
Every bite I eat nourishes you,

you funnel off every drink.

In "The Married Man," "The Cultivated Man" ("Come, we can dance in the furrows. We can hop/ like two rain toads. Hop is a word like Hope,/ only more immediate."), "The Invisible Man," and "Hand Poem" Phillips presents a compelling alternative vision to Rich's oppressive "male god"; feminists should read *The Pregnant Man* if for no other reason than to see, to be forced to see, that "feminine" sensitivity (and, indeed, suffering) is hardly the exclusive lot of women. In a fantasy, "The Skin Game," the poet acquires a wet-suit to protect him—"It's like zipping myself inside/ a deboned black man's hide./ It's being Huckleberry Finn/ inside strong Nigger Jim"—and in "The Stone Crab: A Love Poem," he establishes a rather frightful identity with a creature whose giant claw is broken from him to be eaten (the crab itself is thrown back into the sea so that he can grow another claw). How many losses can he endure?, Phillips inquires.

The first section of *The Pregnant Man* is called "Body Icons," and is prefaced by a statement by Dylan Thomas: "All

THE MARRIED MAN

I was cut in two.
Two halves separated
cleanly between the eyes.
Half a nose and mouth on one
side, ditto on the other.
The split opened my chest
like a chrysalis, a part
neat in the hair.
Some guillotine slammed
through skull, neck, cage,
spine, pelvis, behind,
like a butcher splits a chicken breast.

I never knew which side my heart
was on. Half of me sat happy
in a chair, stared at the other
lying sad on the floor. Half wanted
to live in clover, half to breathe
the city air. One longed to live
Onassis-like, one aspired to poverty.
The split was red and raw.

I waited for someone to unite me.
My mother couldn't do it. She claimed
the sissy side and dressed it like a doll.
My father couldn't do it. He glared
at both sides and didn't see a one.
My teachers couldn't do it. They stuck
a gold star on one forehead,
dunce-capped the other.

So the two halves lived in a funny house,
glared at one another through the seasons;
one crowed obscenities past midnight,
the other sat still, empty as a cup.
One's eye roadmapped red from tears,
the other, clear and water-bright.
Stupid halves of me! They couldn't even
decide between meat and fish on Fridays.
Then one began to die. It turned grey as old meat.

Until you entered the room
of my life. You took the hand of one
and the hand of the other
and clasped them in the hands of you.
The two of me and the one of you
joined hands and danced about the room,
and you said, "You've got to pull yourself
together!", and I did, and we are two-
stepping our lives together still,

And it is only when I study hard
the looking-glass I see that one
eye is slightly higher, one corner
of my mouth twitches—a fish on a hook!—
whenever you abandon me.

Robert Phillips

(from *The Pregnant Man*)

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thoughts and actions emanate from the body. Every idea, intuitive or intellectual, can be imaged and translated in terms of the body, its flesh, blood, sinews, veins, glands, organs, cells, or senses." Phillips's poems on various body organs or bodily predicaments—poems on the skin, on the heart, on the head, the penis, the hand, the foot, and on the recurring metaphor of male pregnancy—are wittily accomplished, and might be misread as satirical verse just as Steinberg's art is often misread as cartoon art. Elsewhere in the volume Phillips is more conventionally "serious": his poems on Picasso, Giacometti, Burchfield ("God is what you find under a rock, God/ is the face of a hollyhock/ in the late great paintings of Burchfield"), Carson McCullers, Delmore Schwartz, and Shirley Jackson are simply very good poems. *The Pregnant Man* seems a slimmer volume than it really is, perhaps because one wishes it longer.

Tread the Dark (Atlantic-Little Brown; $7.95), David Ignatow's 11th book, contains some of the best work of his that I have seen. Ignatow, like Rich, is contemptuous of "perfect form": in Poem 88 he mocks, in one of his few explicitly angry statements, the American poetry establishment which at one time made a virtue of well-groomed, fastidiously-wrought incapacity. It is hardly a revelation to say that Ignatow writes in the tradition of Whitman and Williams, and that he has developed a conversational, understated tone that would make a poem of his immediately recognizable anywhere. Yet in *Tread the Dark*, in the parable-like prose poems especially, there is a quizzical, highly intellectual consciousness at work, an intelligence that hides itself, paradoxically, behind what might be called the "simple speech" of everyday life. Ignatow's art isn't simple, however, any more than Williams's was. One encounters in their poetry the casual ease of common speech employed to record distinctly uncommon states of mind and the effect, when most successful, is far more striking than a well-wrought infinitely self-conscious poem of Wallace Stevens's. Whitman wrote very little about the act of writing; Williams is famous for his "no ideas but in things" though he does propound aesthetic theories in his poetry; but Ignatow's poems in *Tread the Dark* seem to be almost exclusively about poetry, even when they deal, metaphorically, with images far removed from the poetic consciousness. (What is the poet's mind, Ignatow wonders, that it "seeks to replace the real with its own version.")

Ignatow always reads like a confessional poet, which is one of the disguises he takes; he sounds defiantly personal, yet the reader comes away with almost no knowledge of his personal life. His vision is austere, as well as ironic and frequently self-deprecatory: you may think he is speaking of Ignatow, but how *can* he speak of Ignatow since his very identity is a mystery to him? There are many "I's" in *Tread the Dark* and they are all convincing. One contemplates suicide; another knows himself an "unfinished" human being; still another is perfectly at home in the world, knowing himself an "affectionate" man in love with the very contradictions that compose him. "Is identity necessary?" Ignatow asks in one of his enigmatic little prose poems ("Is There a Value to Life?").

Space doesn't allow me to quote as much from *Tread the Dark* as I would like. Several of the prose poems are perfect miniatures—"The Suicide," "I'm a Depressed Poem," Poem 59, "This False Desire," which speaks of the poet's temptation to become a "chanter of life, a bard who calls on others to live for the glory of living"—and the longer poems demand to be quoted in their entirety. Also, the book is constructed like a journal: one has the impression of reading the poet's thoughts as they move, and change, from day to day. Images of death, pain, and despair appear to be transformed gradually into images of acceptance, even pleasure, but the transformation is certainly not a mechanical one, and it is not without that quirky reasonableness in the face of the unbearable that is a characteristic of Ignatow's poetry.

Here is one for Robert Lowell:

I sit here thinking I should write,
in dread of stepping outside
the room to find nothing exists.
Here I can make something exist.
There I find myself non-existent
in doubt in empty space. Poem in hand
I can walk out of the room in safety.
I tack it upon a wall.
The emptiness gathers around it
and begins to read.

And "The Vase":

See how tall and straight I stand
with blossoms above me. Could anything
be more beautiful than I who am nothing
but an enclosure upon emptiness?

In Ignatow's world, as in Williams's, "to look for meaning is as foolish as to find it." *Tread the Dark* ends with a note of humility, reverence:

The trees are tall gods
commanding a view
of my study. I bow
my head over my typewriter
and start the ceremony
of a prayer

("Epilogue")

Mary Oliver's *The Night Traveler* (Bits Press; $2.00), published in chapbook form by a small press, is far more conventional in style and vision than the other books under review. Judging from the rhythms of "Blackleaf Swamp" ("I'm going to Blackleaf Swamp./ I'll be back tomorrow,/ Maybe.") she has read, and learned from, Frost; each of the 26 poems is carefully, beautifully, constructed around an image or event out of nature, or out of the poet's family life. *The Night Traveler* proposes that one lives in two worlds, that of the personal and familial, and that of the impersonal and inhuman. One is lonely in both. Relatives age, sink into senility, die; the "kingdom" of nature is finally inaccessible: "The dream of my life/ Is to lie down by a slow river/ And stare at the light in the trees—/ To learn something by being nothing/ A little while but the rich/ Lens of attention" but consciousness itself does not belong in such a world.

If Oliver's vision is more conventional than Adrienne Rich's, it is also, perhaps, more convincing. She sees the true "terror" of the country as nature's pitiless disregard for the individual, whether prey or predator; she cannot divide the world into victim and oppressor. "Beasts of all marvelous feature,/ Of vibrant hoof and wing,/ Watch the white hands of winter/ Undoing everything,/ And do not cry or argue./ The starvlings of the day/ Never dreamt of better./ Nibbling, they fall away" ("Winter in the Country"). And the poet takes her place in this unsentimental, unpoliticized world:

I have sharpened my knives, I have
Put on the heavy apron.

Maybe you think life is chicken soup, served
In blue willow-pattern bowls.

I have put on my boots and opened
The kitchen door and stepped out

In the sunshine. I have crossed the lawn,
I have entered

The hen house.

("Farm Country")

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Twenty-six meticulously and lovingly imagined poems: yet while our two or three "famous" poets can expect reviews everywhere, I rather doubt that the gifted Mary Oliver will be reviewed at all.

BLACKLEAF SWAMP

I'm going to Blackleaf Swamp.
I'll be back tomorrow,
Maybe.

I want to see
The hunting owls ride by
All glassy-eyed and gloomy.

I want to see
Pools where the striped snakes cool
The burden of their backs,

Where the muskrat floats,
And the lilies shiver
Under the fingers of the moon.

If I am a woman, and tame,
Does it mean I cannot be
Part bird, part beast?

And if this is so, why does a wing in the air
Sweep against my blood
Like a small sharp oar?

And if I am alive, but must die,
Is it not proper to study
Darkness and trees and water?

Along the shore
The grass is so green and fine,
It feels like the love of my mother.

Mary Oliver

(from *The Night Traveler*, Bits Press, Department of English, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio 44160.)

The Year of Our Birth is Sandra McPherson's third book. (The year happens to be 1943.) Her voice is cool, unhurried, precise, at times touchingly and bravely sardonic, as in "An Anonymous Pornographic Valentine" ("You were expecting something a little more sentimental perhaps?"). Behind the surface deftness, the oblique dream-like languorously "surreal" texture of the poems, there are a child's landscapes—visions of parents, the elderly, an open casket; there are quietly-expressed yearnings for "hometown streets" while the poet disciplines herself in the "imaginary." One of the finest poems, "Centerfold Reflected in a Jet Window" focuses upon the bizarre image of a naked woman "flying alongside the airplane" in which the poet rides, along with her daughter. (The man in the seat in front of her is reading a magazine.) Another powerful poem, "The Mouse," meditates upon "the small meats" of mice bodies and then makes the leap to the poet's mother, who has entered a hospital to die, "then didn't die and even began to eat." Coming home, she sees "the earth . . . strung and tied/ with cold-faded grass. Squirrels flock/ and smarten in the short sunlight./ The owl appears by day. She fears forgetting."

The Year of Our Birth is certainly a respectable collection, yet it falls short of expectations; other, earlier work of McPherson's is much more deeply felt, and there is a poem, "The Steps," in the current issue of *Antaeus*, that is better than most of the poems here. "Wearing White," for instance, is very nearly a parody of American surrealistic poetry (indeed, it sounds like James Dickey's cruel parody of Robert Bly): "The old dogged ways of writing poems/ cover with snow. Juncos, bodied like lynx tails,/ fly out of the empty prison." And on through images of taxidermy, a frozen wasp, maple trees, a pocket watch, the poet's white clothing, a seamstress with a headache, cold hands that must keep cold, "like milk." "The Gun Is Such a Horse" makes such "provocative" statements as "The gun is such a horse/ people are thrown around by it/ it eats carrots and sugarcane/ it has an iron shoe for defense and games. . . . / The gun is such a mosquito/ thin for any target" and so on, and so on. One can imagine a writing workshop inventing such a poem, each student contributing an unlikely metaphor. (Ironically, a poem about senility is quite successful because the associative method does suggest, and perhaps even imitate, the mind's "leaps" in such a state of reduced consciousness.)

Alfred Corn is another young poet (born in 1943) who has written promising work; his first book was *All Roads at Once* (1976). But *A Call in the Midst of the Crowd* (Viking; $8.95) is sharply disappointing. Its center is a very long poem about New York City that is not only unfortunately reminiscent of Williams's *Paterson*, but seems to possess no distinctive poetic voice of its own. So much of it is excerpts from other writers—among them Henry James, Hart Crane, Samuel Gompers, Tocqueville, Walt Whitman, Edith Wharton—that it is hardly more than a sort of commonplace book; and not all of the excerpts are really very interesting. There are paragraphs about New York from the *Encyclopedia Americana*, a pedestrian guide to the "Empire State," an advertising brochure, threaded in with Corn's own extremely minimal thoughts on the subject: "The Hudson yields unpalatable eels/ And shad that some people fish for and eat./ Of the common animal species, many/ Live in the parks: frogs, a few fish,/ Earthworms, beetles, chipmunks, snakes." He tries to write about the bombing of historic Fraunces Tavern by a Puerto Rican nationalist group, in which four people were killed and 44 injured, but speaks stumblingly of "mangled/ Bodies; bloody rags; something smeared on the walls./ (This is too hot to handle, can't be done,/ Or done well.)." There are awkward figures of speech ("the grass by magic has/ Communicated a wet coolness/ To the seat of my pants"), and lapses of taste that are dreadful even if deliberate ("It seemed a certain stiffness/ Was de rigueur among the dead"). Robert Phillips can handle witty asides, puns

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that undercut a poem's seriousness or pretentiousness; but it is difficult to do this sort of thing gracefully, and Corn's talent seems to be for the purely lyric, the emotional. Indeed, he confesses that he has "moods—often mistaken for morals or philosophy."

From time to time personalities emerge in *A Call in the Midst of the Crowd*, but they are disappointingly anemic. The poet, evidently accompanied by another man, takes a ferry ride on a day that "prosiness feels right"; what might have been a poignant and dramatic poem if written by Adrienne Rich sinks into banalities as the issue of the men's relationship is raised, and feebly dropped: "By the way,"/ (We're climbing stairs), "what about Thanksgiving?"/ You don't know, no special plans." The poet wonders whether they are wasting time.

When lyric poetry is not imaginatively written its most fundamental (perhaps its basest) motive becomes painfully clear: it is a record of thinking and doing, a way of making the temporary appear to be permanent. But the desultory jottings of a diary cannot be transposed into poetry, especially when the poet's ostensible subject is so large as New York City, and his viewpoint fragmented and superficial. Other work of Corn's, though reminiscent of the brooding, meditative poetry of Stevens, Wilbur, and Nemerov, is at least more rigorously shaped and more deserving of the accolade art—if we mean by "art" that which can interest people beyond the artist and his intimate circle.

David Hackett Fischer on history

Learning grows in great surges of discovery. The discipline of history is just now in the midst of such a growth. To be an historian today (a young social historian especially) is to share something of the excitement that must have been felt by young physicists in the early 20th century, by young biologists in the mid 19th, by young archaeologists in the 18th. A decade ago, George Gamow eloquently described that glorious feeling in his memoir *Thirty Years That Shook Physics*. A decade to come, some social historian now in midcareer might write a book called *Forty Years That Shook History*, for history is now being shaken to its very foundation by an intellectual revolution which may in time prove to be even more profound in its effect than the discovery of quantum physics, or the invention of evolutionary biology, or the development of classical archaeology. History is harder than science, and the process of its transformation is more complex. But the work is already well begun, and clearly manifest in a remarkable crop of new history books which have come out this year.

When one surveys this outpouring of work the first impression is of an explosion of historical knowledge. A catalogue might be compiled of new discoveries, which have been many and important. But in the books of the present year another and more interesting theme appears. The first stages of the historical revolution consisted mostly in the progress of historical analysis. Now analysis is beginning to be followed by synthesis. One synthesizing strategy presently in use might be called *macrohistory*—an approach which studies large systems—civilizations, nations, societies—as they have changed through time. Macrohistory is the big picture. It deals in aggregate relationships—seeks to discover what Durkheim called "social facts" as opposed to "individual facts."

My candidate for the best book of the year is a distinguished example of macrohistory, Geoffrey Barraclough's [London] *Times Atlas of World History* (Hammond; $50), a big (11 by 14.5 inches) and very beautiful book which consists of about 130 plates, 600 maps and an accompanying text, written by 80 British and American scholars (including this reviewer, who hereby acknowledges a conflict of interest). The grand design is the work of Barraclough himself, a medievalist now turned contemporary historian, who undertook to do a new sort of atlas: to stress social and economic history more than politics and war, to represent dynamic processes in the past, and not be constrained by national boundaries. Miraculously, he has carried it off.

The atlas is something of an historical event in its own right—a million-dollar investment by the London *Times*, published simultaneously in seven languages, with rave reviews everywhere. The book was produced by Barry Winkleman, the energetic managing director of Times Books. For the design of the work, he turned from the established house of John Bartholomew to a different sort of firm—Product Support (Graphics) Ltd., founded primarily to produce advertising for Rolls Royce cars. The result is very strong in some ways, weak in others, but on balance highly successful. The plates are drafted to a low standard of cartographic accuracy, far below Bartholomew's best work but the plates are vivid, imaginative, boldly drawn, brilliantly colored, and accurate enough for the purpose at hand.

A new computer-assisted cartographic technology allowed the designers to create novel map projections almost at will. The result is a good deal of innovation in historical cartography—a map of the rise of Islam with an unusual projection centered on Mecca; a chart of Adriatic trade routes looking outward from Venice toward Greece; a marvelously sinister global projection for a map of the barbarian invasions. The maps, as well as the text, are designed in most cases to argue an historical thesis, which they do with stunning effect. The powerful graphic techniques of modern advertising have been joined to a serious scholarly purpose.

The atlas is not without flaws. The editor has a set of old-fashioned Marxist ideas about history. As a consequence, perhaps, the atlas is strong on material processes but weak on cultural history. The American and French revolutions are given short shrift, compared with those of China and Russia. Canada is omitted almost entirely, and the plates on American imperialism and the United States in the 20th century are crude and vapid.

But altogether it is a spendid book which deserves its success. If any general reader can buy but one history book this year, let it be the *Times Atlas*, the best single volume of universal history available today.

Another great atlas has been published this year, *A Historical Atlas of South*

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Asia, edited by Joseph E. Schwartzberg (Chicago; $160). The atlas—also a collective effort—covers all the countries of the Asian subcontinent—India and Pakistan, the mountain nations in the high Himalayas and the Hindu Kush, and island states in the Indian Ocean. Much attention is also given to Burma and southeast Asia. Roughly half the plates deal with events before 1947; half with those after. It is a huge book, much bigger than the *Times Atlas*, and every plate is jam-packed with information. I have never seen social and cultural history so brilliantly mapped before in any historical atlas. The plates on religion and castes and tribes of India are models of clarity and comprehension. Another extraordinary plate describes the concentration of real wealth in India by an ingenious combination of historical cartography, Lorenz curves and Gini Ratios. Other unusual maps are devoted to house-types, language, literature and education.

The work succeeds better as science than art. By comparison with the *Times Atlas*, the cartography lacks flair and imagination. The colors were not well-chosen for visual effect, too many of the maps are static, and their coverage is somewhat uneven—strong on social and cultural history, weak on war and military affairs. And a few of the early plates are so cluttered that the main lines of interpretation are obscured.

But altogether it is a magnificent achievement—the most informative volume on South Asian history I have read, and a great work of historical geography.

*

An old form of macrohistory, which has a new vigor today, is what the Germans called *Kulturgeschichte*, the historical study of cultures. The last generation did this work mostly in terms of *Kultur* with a capital K, high culture, which was studied as a subject for the history of ideas. The next generation will study *kultur* with a small k, general culture, more as an anthropological than an intellectual problem. In each case, the idea of a culture is a powerful synthesizing tool.

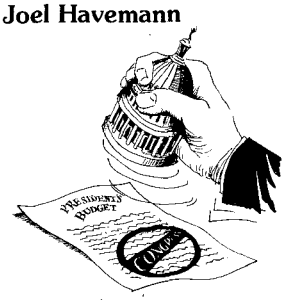
Lying somewhere between these two approaches is an extraordinary three volume work which has been published this year—Richard Beale Davis's, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763* (Tennessee; $60). The University of Tennessee Press has issued this enormous work in a limited three-volume letter press edition—laboriously set by hand in a beautiful Garamond type printed on paper made to last 300 years. The set is beautifully bound and boxed; for bibliophiles it is an astonishing buy at $60.

Davis's work is a remarkably comprehensive history of culture in the southern colonies. The author discusses in great detail the planting of the colonies as a cultural process, with a particularly good long section on the Indian as "image and factor" in southern colonial life. He deals with education, books and reading, religion and science, technology and agriculture, fine arts and literature, politics and economics, law and oratory, all in great depth from primary materials. The result is an invaluable synthesis of its subject, a little closer to *Kultur-* than *kulturgeschichte*, but in that respect a synthesis of method as well as substance. A major work.

Macrohistory is large in scope, but not impersonal. It includes a genre which might be called macrobiography—studies of Hegel's "world historical actors" in relation to their time. Many books of that sort have appeared this year. Two stand out from the crowd. Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time* (Princeton; $30) is an old classic, first published in German 25 years ago, now at last issued in a definitive English edition.

Mehmed II, a great world conqueror worthy of comparison with Alexander and Napoleon, was the Turkish sultan who captured Constantinople in 1453, then led his army of Janissaries into Europe as far as Belgrade (where the chivalry of Europe fled for their lives, and the Turks were stopped on the Danube by Hunyadi's peasant army in a battle so bloody that the river ran red for miles.) Mehmed marched his armies north into Russia, west to Italy (invaded in 1480) and east into Asia where in 1481 he died suddenly at the age of 49, probably poisoned by his physicians. Had he lived a normal span, the history of the world might be very different. Mehmed was a coldly calculating man, of unimaginable cruelty. His biographer estimates that the sultan was responsible for the killing of 873,000 people in his short life. At the same time he was a learned patron of art, literature and science, an administrator of great skill, an architect of a policy of religious toleration, and a devout Moslem worshipped by his subjects as a holy man. Babinger's biography is a great work of scholarship, which does full justice to the complexity of its subject. It is also a great work of literature which may be highly recommended to the general reader.

CONGRESS AND THE BUDGET
By Joel Havemann



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If one sort of macrohistory is about Hegel's world historical individuals, another deals with world historical ideas. An excellent book of that type has come out this year—J.R. Pole's *The Pursuit of Equality in American History* (California; $15) a major work which deserves more attention than it has received. The author has given us a broad and powerful synthetic study of the idea of equality during the past two centuries. He deals with his subject in broad terms—equality before the law, equality of opportunity, equality of esteem, moral equality, political equality, sexual equality—and discusses those themes with sensitivity. The book is not easy to read—but it is clearly important. J.R. Pole is one of the most serious and best informed European students of American society. He has given us a work of intelligence and wisdom.

Another type of macrohistory is the period piece, a study limited not in space but in time. A magnificent book of that sort has been published this year—Jan Romein's *The Watershed of Two Eras* (Wesleyan; $25). Romein was a great Dutch "liberal Marxist" historian, who largely because of his politics was without honor in his own country, and largely unknown in the United States. His works are only now being discovered, translated and widely read. *The Watershed of Two Eras* is a study of Europe in the period from 1890 to World War I, which for the author was the grand climacteric of European capitalism. The central theme is the growth of uncertainty in politics and economics, society and culture, art and science. The author's erudition is extraordinary; and his Marxist principles are tempered by a deep humanistic spirit. It is a work which every serious student of history will have to study carefully, and an attractive book for the general reader. The translation by Arnold Pomerans is excellent.

Everyone seems to be trying his hand at macrohistory these days. Even natural scientists are getting into the act. An astrophysicist named Steven Weinburg has published a remarkable little book called *The First Three Minutes* (Basic Books; $9). It is a double history of sorts—a history of the beginning of the universe and of the growth of knowledge about it. Weinberg summarizes a great deal of complex technical information in a form so simple that a nonphysicist can almost understand him. The interpretation is a bit thin on the first hundredth of a second. Progress of cosmological research in the past three decades tells us many things, but it stands mute on the central mystery. Altogether, it is a book not to be missed. Preston Cloud, a distinguished biogeologist, has given us in *Cosmos, Earth and Man: A Short History of the Universe* (Yale; $14.95), a narrative history of the universe itself, the chemical origins of life, and the evolution of living organisms on the earth. A crisp, intelligent survey.

One final piece of macrohistory is contributed by an anthropologist, Marvin Harris's *Cannibals and Kings: The Origins of Cultures* (Vintage; $2.95). It is mostly a book on origins—of farming, war, male supremacy, cannibalism and capitalism. Harris argues for a materialist interpretation of history, and against the idea of progress. To be frank, I thought this book grossly imbalanced, dogmatic, reductive and suffocating in its single-minded materialism, which the author proclaims to the world as if he had just invented it. But many of my colleagues, whose opinions I respect, think it is an important work. Read it and judge for yourself.

II

Another broad set of synthesizing strategies might be called *microhistory*—the little picture. Microhistory is not merely a small piece of history. It is an attempt to create a synthesis on a small scale. It deals with individuals, little communities, small groups, families, firms. In its own way, it also tries to put the pieces together, working outward from individual experiences, attitudes and acts.

Microhistory is a very powerful instrument of historical scholarship, more manageable in many ways than the great and often unwieldy forms of macrohistory. Most of the new social history has been microhistorical in nature, for macroproblems are mostly beyond the reach of single scholars working alone in a new and largely unexplored field.

Between macro- and microhistorians there has grown up a spirit of mutual incomprehension, hostility, distrust, contempt. Microhistorians complain that macro works are impersonal, anonymous, elitist, lacking any real sense of human experience in history. Macrohistorians on the other hand often regard microstudies as trivial, insignificant, quite unimportant in the larger context of world history.

We can see this unhappy conflict developing in reviews, where microhistory is too often condemned because it isn't macro, and vice versa. Microhistory and macrohistory, however, are both equally valid as synthesizing devices. They are not contradictory but complementary. Macrohistory teaches us about the main lines of systemic social change. Microhistory tells us, in the language of my students, "what it was like." Each method deserves to be taken on its own terms.

The most common form of microhistory is the community study—which in social history today is no longer local but localized history—a synthetic device on a small scale. In America, works of that sort began to be published about a decade ago. Now they are coming out in great numbers, and many have appeared this year. The most notable of them is Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* (Braziller; $20), a very big book about a very small mountain village, (pop. 250) in southern France during the 14th century.

The book is a scholarly work of high distinction which has been a runaway bestseller in France. The author, Le Roy Ladurie, is a professor in the College of France and, in the words of Keith Thomas, is "now perhaps the most fashionable living historian in the western world." He is also one of the most able.

The book is about a small village which was infected with the heresy of Albigensianism. In 1320, a bishop named Jacques Fournier undertook to purge it of its errors, and carried out an elaborate investigation of its inhabitants. From the records of that inquisition, Le Roy Ladurie has put together an extraordinarily rich study of the village and its people. He reconstructs the economy and social organization of the community and discusses the most intimate details of medieval life—sex and death, magic and religion, ideas of fate and love. There is even a chapter on body language. It is a virtuoso performance, which brings its subjects to life with remarkable success. No other book that I can think of communicates so clearly the nature of the new history as this one.

Many other excellent community studies have been published this year, and a remarkable number of them are in a class with *Montaillou*. Anthony Wallace, a distinguished American anthropologist, has written *Rockdale* (Knopf; $17.50), a study of industrialization in a small Pennsylvania mill town (pop. 2000) from 1825 to about 1860. His sources are different from those of Le Roy Ladurie—more informative for the

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external organization of the town, less revealing of inner lives and thoughts and feelings. But working from his census tracts and ledger books, and letters and memoirs, Wallace has succeeded remarkably in recovering the life of his community.

Another microhistory which picks up where *Rockdale* ends is *Amoskeag; Life and Work in an American Factory-City* (Pantheon; $15) by Tamara K. Hareven and Randolph Langenbach, photographer-husband and historian-wife. It is an oral history, lavishly illustrated, of the work force of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, once the world's largest textile factory, in Manchester, New Hampshire. The bulk of the book consists of graphic interviews with some 40 people, who speak eloquently and vividly of life in their families, of work in the factory and of ethnic tensions and labor conflicts, and many other things which defy simple summary. It is a powerful documentary work, of remarkable richness and depth.

Frank McArdle's *Altopascio* (Cambridge; $22.50) is an American scholar's study of a Tuscan town (pop. 600), from the 16th to the 18th centuries. The community was owned by the Medicis, and its history is a grim tale of 200 years of relentless exploitation of peasant share-croppers by the vicious constables and corrupt *fattore*. Their houses were wretched hovels, their children were forced into farm work as early as the age of four, crime was endemic (mostly theft of food and fuel). And all the while, the Medicis's income from the village rose as the peasants sank deeper into squalor and misery. Through it all McArdle finds impressive evidence of love and loyalty within peasant families, of a human spirit which even their depth of suffering could not destroy.

Another sort of community history is called by social scientists the *restudy*—an examination of a community at several points over an extended period. The Lynds's work on Middletown was an early and distinguished example. An example from this year is William H. McNeill's *The Metamorphosis of Greece Since World War II* (Chicago; $12.95). McNeill was sent to Greece in 1947 to study village life during the time of troubles which followed World War II. He returned in 1956, 1966 and 1976. This book describes the change (and continuity) he observed in six small villages. He found "a metamorphosis of human life. . . . without parallel in Greece's past." But the new ways are blended with old ones in ways that make the Greek experience of that global process very special and probably unique. McNeill concludes that modernization is "not an identical worldwide process . . . cultural pluralism is as old as humanity and seems likely to survive the homogenizing force of modern communications."

Michael Craton's *Searching for the Invisible Man; Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica* (Harvard; $32.50), is a study of the slave community on a great Jamaican sugar estate called Worthy Park from the 18th to the 20th century. Anyone who has worked with slave materials will find Craton's success astonishing. He manages not merely to reconstitute families, and to synthesize the statistical lines of demographic, economic and family history, but also to reconstruct the biographies of about 40 slaves on the plantation in great detail—an extraordinary achievement. The last chapters bring the history of Worthy Park nearly to the present. Excellent work.

Jerome Handler and Frederick Lange, *Plantation Slavery in Barbados* (Harvard; $8.50) is the combined attempt by an archaeologist and an anthropologist to study slave life on Barbados from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Archaeological methods yielded very little, except bits and pieces of information about burial customs and a few artifacts. But a dig in the documents turned up important information about demography, economics and family life. Another microhistory of Barbados, published this year, is Jill Sheppard's study of *The Redlegs of Barbados*, (Kraus; $12), a most interesting social history of a class that I have always found fascinating—the poor whites who are still to be seen living in rural squalor on Caribbean islands such as St. Kitts and Barbados.

*

A second sort of microhistory is biographical in its nature—the social biography of an individual who is important not so much for what he does, as a mover and shaper of historical events, but for what he is; an exemplar of an historical experience, the representative of a culture or class. French historians of the *Annales* school have elevated this approach into an academic method called exemplarism. One of them, Georges Duby, provides a specimen this year in a little book called *Medieval Marriage* (Johns Hopkins; $10), in which the institution of marriage in the middle ages is studied through the experiences of few individuals, notably the Counts of Guines.

An even better microbiography was published this year by a Chinese historian, Jonathan Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang* (Viking; $11). The book is about the quality of life in northern China during the 17th century. From a variety of local sources, for the country of T'an-ch'eng on the Shantung peninsula, mostly between 1668 and 1672, Spence gleaned the materials for three vignettes. The longest and best is about a woman named Wang who took herself a lover, ran away from her husband, and then when her lover abandoned her, came back to her village, was given shelter by a Taoist priest, discovered by her husband, and killed by him. Spence intersperses a narrative of her life and death with excerpts from literary materials to give a powerful evocation of the quality of life in China three centuries ago. We shall see a great deal more of microbiography in years to come. *The Death of Woman Wang* will be a methodological model for that genre.

A third type of microhistory is the source study—a work which begins with a body of historical evidence, and works outward to reconstruct the experiences of individuals whose lives it describes. An interesting and macabre example has been published this year: Richard Cobb's

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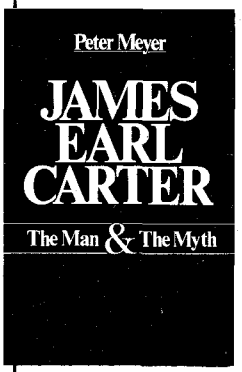

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Death in Paris (Oxford; $13) a little book based entirely on postmortem reports on 404 cadavers in the Paris morgue between 1795 and 1801. All died violently, mostly by their own hand. Cobb uses his materials to construct a study of suicide itself, a calendar of its causes, of its season, of its social consequences. Then he moves outward as far as his evidence allows, to a study of hope and despair in the 18th century, of work and leisure, association and stratification, affection and alienation. It is a bizarre little book, which tells many things about life in Paris, two centuries ago. Cobb has an extraordinary eye for interpretative possibilities, a gift for discovering the truths which his documents *betray*.

Much more of this sort of work is presently underway. The French are doing a series of studies on conscript records. American scholars are working with burial stones, English scholars on emigration records, Chinese historians on sets of collective biographies and Swedes on their unrivalled parish reports. We may expect to see the publication of many more source studies in the future.

A fourth sort of microhistory consists in a study of settings—the physical surroundings of life, and its physical artifacts. One of the most beautiful books published this year is Mark Girouard's *Life in the English Country House* (Yale; $19.95), a survey of country houses through the past five centuries, from a broad range of materials: family archives, literature, plans and photographs. The author is a professor of art at Oxford. His book is strongest as a history of architecture of the country house. An attempt is made to do a social history, with less success. Every imaginable altruism and vice of England's ruling class is visible in the design of their residences. The architecture of the country house makes a sort of mirror for social relationships changing through time. The book itself is a physical artifact of surpassing beauty which could fit on the grandest table in the houses it describes.

An appropriate American counterpart to *The English Country House* is John White's history of *The American Railroad Passenger Car* (Johns Hopkins; $40). The author is curator of transportation in the Smithsonian, and the book is sumptuously published by Johns Hopkins Press and richly illustrated. I turned to it more from duty than expectation, thinking it was a coffee table book or a nostalgia trip for railroad buffs. But it is really a marvelous work of scholarship mostly about railroad technology, but also much more. The aesthetics of the subject are fascinating in many ways. And in social terms the railroad passenger car makes a microcosm of the society through which it moves.

III

Both macrohistory and microhistory are new methods of synthesis in history. But at the same time, there has also been a continuing flow of analytical studies which takes a subject all to pieces, and examines its various parts. Another kind of analytical history seeks to explore new areas, to discover new pieces of knowledge.

Analytical social history continues to expand into new fields which were fallow only a few years ago. Four of these new areas appear in books published this year. One might be called ecohistory—the complex study of physical environments, human cultures, and man himself, all interacting through time. Two new books provide a sense of the direction that this work is taking. Calvin Martin's *Keepers of the Game* (California; $11) is a brilliant book which deals with the complex relationship between American Indians and animals, as it changed through time. Martin argues that an aboriginal ecosystem existed in America before the white man appeared—a complex balance which was regulated by social organization, and by the technology of the chase, and by spiritual values in Indian culture—magic, ritual taboo. That balance was destroyed by "European disease, Christianity and the fur trade," and the symbiosis which had existed between hunters and their game turned into an adversary relationship. The Indians turned upon the animals, and became as destructive of the environment (perhaps more so) as whites would ever be. The evidence for this argument is very weak for the critical period before the arrival of the Europeans. But altogether it is a pathbreaking book.

Another new field is physiological history. Historians today are busily digging up bones—a new specialty is developing called historical paleoarchaeology. Other scholars are scrutinizing height-weight statistics wherever they may be found. And more than a few are making a major subject of nutrition, diet and food, in which interest is growing at a great rate. Many books have been published in that area. The best of them is K. C. Chang's *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* (Yale; $20), a delightful book for the general reader, and an important monograph for sinologists and social historians. It is a cooperative effort by many Chinese scholars, who discuss food in its nutritional, social, economic, and even cosmological aspect—food as a nutrient, as an artifact, as an idea. The reader will discover that chop suey was *not* invented in San Francisco. At the same time, he will be invited to ponder the revolutionary impact of American foods on Chinese life, the development of an ecosystem of extraordinary, perhaps unique, efficiency; the refinement of a rice culture of unimaginable intricacy; the perfection of palates to such a level that the Chinese looked upon French haute cuisine ("everything drowned in sauces!") as the French regard *le petit poulet* of Colonel Sanders.

*

Many themes might be discovered in this year's crop of history books. It has been a bumper year—bigger and better than last year, as last year was better than the year before. Even in the midst of many external difficulties—the job crisis for young scholars, the salary crunch for older ones—one senses the slow return of confidence in a field that was badly shattered only a few years ago. The pieces are really beginning to come together again in new forms, which in time will harden into another sterile orthodoxy and will need to be knocked apart once more. But now, just now, is a special moment for the writing of history, and the reading of it too.

Brief Reviews

Current Fiction

Mystical Union
by Don Robertson
(G.P. Putnam's Sons; $8.95)

Don Robertson obviously loves both his characters and his setting, the little towns of Paradise Falls and LaBelle, Ohio. We can forgive him a good deal because of that; current fiction abounds with writers who have no respect for

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people or place. But this virtue can't overcome serious defects in *Mystical Union*, his 12th novel. For one thing, in this book at least, Robertson has a tin ear. One of his characters muses over the faded glamor of an old movie house and concludes that "in today's language, the Ritz's old marquee would be called, ah, 'glitzy,' and that is probably about as good a word as any."

No, it's not. This book is full of similarly bungled diction, of words that are not good enough, and of too many words in general:

> *The answer sometimes was yes; the answer sometimes was no. But then the world sometimes is yes; the world sometimes is no. So then "always" is floundering. "Always" is bafflement. Still, one never should lose sight of smiles and benevolence. Oh, Barbara wept; she wept; Barbara did weep; she did indeed.*

And I nearly wept as well, out of frustration that no one edited this mess into something more readable. Robertson is an honorable writer, tackling difficult themes, and he needed the kind of help skilled editors are supposed to provide. Because he didn't get it, *Mystical Union* is formless, flat and repetitive.

Robertson is trying to give a view of marriage—the "union" of the title—as practiced in Paradise Falls and environs from about 1910 until now. The central story is the love of Don Pilgrim and Barbara Sellers. They marry; she leaves him for an impotent windbag. They remarry; then he leaves her for a solitary life running an HO model railroad exhibit. In between, they wonder what is wrong with their lives, and why love fades.

Robertson has a firm sense of how small-town life can pinch the soul. Barbara has a gift for writing, but she gives up her aspirations "because writing would make her appear . . . strange." Not that writing is the answer, either: Harry MacNiece, who longs to be another Sherwood Anderson or Ross Lockridge, is so disappointed in his small gifts as a writer and a lover that he commits suicide, leaving one of the most doggedly literary notes in the history of the novel ("Hey, is Paradise Falls the Bermuda Triangle of the soul? What does it have to do with the strange & forever magical hunkered colossal wreck that is Raintree County?"). Leaving town isn't the answer either; Don's father counsels him that "the bullshit of LaBelle is the bullshit of the world, and you can't slide a piece of paper under the difference." The villain, it seems, is life itself, which traps us in a "vaporous wishing" for release, a yearning for love and an escape from the trap. But there is nothing waiting but pain, regret and death, summed up in Barbara's dying comment, "Debris"—which seems to be Robertson's final verdict on marriage and on life.

Robertson is a prolific writer; according to the book's jacket, a 13th novel, *Victoria at Nine*, is set for publication, and he is at work on a 14th.

One can only hope he will get some solid editing on future projects. "I don't want to hear a prose poem!" Barbara snaps at one point as Don launches into another aria of complaint. I sympathized with her completely. We know that Robertson feels deeply, which is the first step toward writing good fiction. Now he must learn to tell his readers exactly what he feels, to make them feel it, and to quit while he's ahead.

Garrett Epps

Garrett Epps is author of the novel, *The Shad Treatment*, which won the Lillian Smith Award in 1977 for best fiction about the South.

The Rawhide Knot and Other Stories by Conrad Richter

(Alfred A. Knopf; $8.95)

The landscape in Conrad Richter's fiction was more alive than his people. The awe his pioneer characters felt toward The Land—and the various ways they were humanized by it—was what saved his stories and novels from degenerating into Hollywood movie outlines.

The Rawhide Knot and Other Stories, a posthumous collection of Richter's shorter pieces, typifies his strengths and weaknesses. Some of the stories—notably those set in remote corners of American history—succeed beautifully in creating the lost landscape. The title story, for example, evokes the independence of the early settlers in the Ohio Valley's "lonely green waves of unbroken forest." A lovely piece about a young buffalo hunter, "Early Americana," also deals with a vast landscape where people are dwarfed by nature, yet made human by its mystery. Because plot is secondary to setting, these stories stick in the imagination—they feel like authentic glimpses into the American past.

Other stories fall completely flat. "The Simple Life," a corny piece about two cowpokes and their quarrel over a gal, reads like the rough draft of "Oklahoma"; Gabby Hayes would have had trouble speaking its dialogue. And "The Dower Chest," about a peace-loving Amishman and a girl who just happens to love shooting Indians, is the worst kind of *Saturday Evening Post* goop—sentimental, racist, unconsciously brutal. These stories underscore the severe limitations of Richter's art: he couldn't create fiction in which human beings were more important than nature.

In the foreword to *The Rawhide Knot*, Richter's daughter, Harvena, praises the stories for their "almost elemental simplicity," calling them "classics of the American frontier." Filial affection aside, her statement has some truth in it: awkward and heavy-handed as some of them are, at their best these stories touch the heartbeat under the frontier landscape, the forces that for hundreds of years made it the most attractive place on earth.

George Blecher

George Blecher teaches literature and creative writing at Lehman College, CUNY.

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists by Robert Tressell

(Monthly Review Press; $7.50)

"The workers are the real oppressors," says Owen, the protagonist in this novel of the working class in pre-World War I England. A Socialist, Owen vents his frustration when his fellow workers fail to respond to his analysis of the class

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struggle. Unable to defeat their own ignorance, they are helpless to defeat the system that enthralls them.

First published in a shortened edition in 1914, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* has been restored to its full length by the Monthly Review Press. As much social history as novel, this eye-level view of construction laborers in a town in the south of England combines authentic setting with emotional and psychological flatness. The characters lack inner conflict; being uneducated, they are unable to analyze their own experiences. Even as victims of an unjust social order, they achieve no sense of a common fate and consequently no sense of a common defiance. Each accepts the dismal conditions of work and home with the solemnity of a martyr. Owen's belief in Socialism does not stop him from blaming the workers for the conditions they accept as befitting "the likes of us." That they have not responded to Owen's message is more likely a failure of personality: Owen is simply not exciting. Moreover, to embrace the Socialist message the workers would have to abandon everything familiar. Poverty is natural to them.

Not to Owen. His education, the origins of which are never explained, frees him from dependency upon conditions. Only once is his Socialist vision overwhelmed. When he discovers he has tuberculosis and foresees his death, he decides ". . . not to leave his wife and son . . . alone and defenseless in the midst of the Christian wolves . . . but put them out of reach of further suffering . . . to come with him." Tressell's work is vivid evidence of the dominant culture's power to crush the individual. It is, as Allan Sillitoe says in his introduction, a classic.

Carey Goodwyn

Carey Goodwyn is a freelance writer.

Kauffmann, *from page 18*

Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick, How I Won the War, The Marquise of O, The Milky Way, The Passion of Anna, The Red and the White, The Rise of Louis XIV, La Salamandre, The Sorrow and the Pity. I named only four third world films: *Blood of the Condor, Hour of the Furnaces, Memories of Underdevelopment, Ramparts of Clay.* I foolishly overlooked *The Battle of Chile.*

The tabulated results of the poll contained no surprises. The US film with most mentions was *The Godfather,* the European was *My Night at Maud's* (though with only half of the mentions of *The Godfather*—the European voting was more scattered), the third world leader was *Memories of Underdevelopment* (with even fewer mentions—some critics didn't even vote in this category).

I don't like to do 10 Best lists at the end of a year because a year is too short a span in which to hand out wreaths or even pick favorites—I consider myself lucky if I even *like* 10 films a year. A decade is a more sensible span. But I was amused to read that some critics declined to respond to this poll because they're against 10 Best lists on principle. These same critics belong to critics' societies in which—every year—they vote for Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Clapper Boy, Best Script Typist, etc.

Of course if the poll had included 1978, I'd have had to try to work in Bergman's *Autumn Sonata.* Thinking about that increasingly rewarding film in the light of all the above, I realize that there was an extrinsic pleasure in it: a nostalgic feeling of resurgence, as if the golden harvest of the 1960s from abroad was being renewed. (*Scenes from a Marriage,* wonderful as much in it was, didn't have the same effect because it was condensed from a long TV series and felt like it.) I should have noted in my review of *Autumn Sonata* that Strindberg referred to his Chamber Plays as "last sonatas"—and called one of them *The Ghost Sonata.* Still I think that the tenor of the film is more like Ibsen: the past-as-present idea is as compressed as in Ibsen, the symbolism generally conveyed in the prosaic.

Film-Prose-Muddies-On Dept. Christine Gledhill in an article called "Recent Developments in Feminist Criticism" (*Quarterly Review of Film Studies,* Fall 1978) burbles about "the designation of cinema as an iconic medium ideologically complicit with an epistemology of vision based on the self-evident character of phenomenal appearances, and devoted to re-playing the process of the construction of the subject in order to reconfirm the ideological unity of the patriarchal subject outside contradiction."

As the Nurse says in *Romeo and Juliet:*

O Lord, I could have stayed here all the night
To hear good counsel. O, what learning is!

Correspondence, *from page 3*

Thatcher for Mr. Heath and secondly by Mr. Callaghan's conquering of the political middle ground *viz.* the disarray of the Liberal party and the silence of the Tory left.

Mr. Soskin is correct when he refers to the increasing voice of the Trade Union movement in the Labour party in recent years (so necessary for the success of the attack on inflation). Where he displays his ignorance of British politics is in his comment that this represents a drift to the left. On the contrary, if it is necessary to apply labels to the various constituent parts of the Labour party, then the Trade Union movement is generally to the right and the Constituency parties are to the left.

As far as Mrs. Thatcher's "victory of landslide proportions" in recent by-elections is concerned, I would point Mr. Soskin and his ilk to the most recent result at Berwick, where against all predictions, the Labour party with Mr. Heath's support for their economic policies, triumphed over Tories, Liberals, and Scottish Nationalists alike.

Robin Buchanan
London, England

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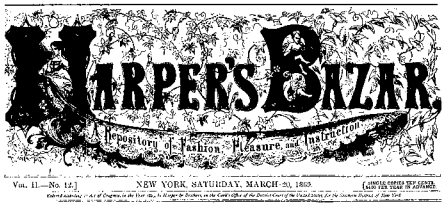
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Korea Diarist

Tunnel Vision

It is characteristic of the rich that they look at a problem only from their own perspective. This applies, I think, to international as well as to personal affairs. A late November visit to South Korea to attend an academic conference on northeast Asian security affairs, sponsored by Seoul and Georgetown universities is illustrative. For some time now, the US has been willing to cast Korea aside as a poor relative, capable of nothing more than public embarrassment of US congressmen. In recent years the very mention of Seoul brought visions of a miasma of corruption rising from the picturesque mountains and valleys of the Land of the Morning Calm. Activities of the infamous Tongson Park, the rice dealer and wheeler, especially his largess to members of the Congress, led to charges that Seoul was tampering with the American democratic process. This impression was compounded by the squirmings of the House Ethics Committee, which finally found the courage to censure two of the gift recipients (whose crime was not reporting the money as a campaign contribution) and the strength to bury the rest under a layer of unctuousness. There is nothing in the forthcoming full report of that committee suggesting changes in our criminal justice system to allow each criminal to judge his own case and recommend his own punishment.

The Tongson Park case soured US-Korean relations enough to allow President Carter to fulfill, almost, a campaign pledge—namely, to withdraw US troops from Korea. How many liberal votes this earned for him is not known, but at least he captured the support of Richard Holbrooke, former editor of *Foreign Policy* and now his assistant secretary of state for Asian affairs. Holbrooke has specialized in beating down the loyal, like South Korea and Taiwan, making fault of their simple virtues of industry and spectacular economic development and their unflinching loyalty and friendship to the United States. Such traits do seem suspect in this age. Ridding ourselves of this kind of companion seems a small price to pay for a more formal friendship with a Peking regime having trouble keeping its political and economic house in order, light years behind either the Soviet Union or the United States in modern military power, but attractive to some American foreign policy makers because of its strident anti-Soviet slogans.

The South Koreans are worried about another invasion from the north. The North Koreans have a population of 17 million. With the aid of Peking and Moscow, they have built up a formidable military machine at the expense of the growth of a normal peacetime economy. About 18 percent of their national budget goes to military needs. The civilian economy is in shambles and Pyongyang has defaulted on about three billion dollars in loans. The glorious leader Kim Il-song is now 66. "Crazy Kim" may want to make one last charge. The South Korean intellectuals aren't interested in only a strong South Korean defense, although that is important with Seoul just 30 miles south of the demilitarized zone. Instead, they want enough strength, Korean and American, for a plausible deterrent—that is, enough force so that there will not be another war.

US congressional delegations have crawled out from behind the bushes and are visiting Seoul again. The most visible group when I was there was the House Armed Forces committee, led by chairman Mel Price, Democrat of Illinois, and Bob Wilson, Republican of California. Both are still upset by the decision of the Carter administration to withdraw in stages the US Second Infantry Division. The US ambassador gave a cocktail reception for the 15 congressmen and their wives. The American military officers turned out in force. There were enough American generals in their blue dress uniforms to take up most of the Second Division slack. The Korean generals infiltrated more quietly in conservative business suits.

The word infiltration has taken on an ominous note up in the Demilitarized Zone (the DMZ). The problem is the tunnels, which just possibly may be dangerous. The North Koreans in their continuing "red alert" phase have placed their key defense factories and military installations underground. One assumes that once the burrowing skills had been acquired and everything of military value protected, they figured there was no better way to employ this technically skilled work force than to dig into South Korea. So far three tunnels have been discovered, the most recent in October. That one was more than 200 feet below the surface, dug for the most part through granite rock, and wide enough for three to four North Korean troops to march abreast. One can visit the tunnel site, if one doesn't mind splashing about in the cold water. I settled for looking at the entrance discovered in the Korean section of the DMZ from a field telescope at a safe distance. Once the southerners discovered this tunnel, the North Koreans blasted it closed. A cautious clearing of the debris is still underway. (There were booby traps left behind in the second tunnel, which claimed victims.) From technical soundings, the US and Korea agree that there are about 15 similar tunnels extending under the DMZ, designed to get by the South Korean first line of defense. The North Koreans have denied they have anything to do with the complicated engineering, and that instead, the tunneling has been dug by disgrunted South Koreans trying to return to the northern fatherland.

The population of Seoul is now just under eight million, up from about 500,000 at the end of the fighting in 1953. New 20-story hotels and apartment buildings are going up everywhere. The Korean economy is an economic miracle, with extraordinary annual growth rates of over 20 percent, now with a troubling inflation of about 15 percent. Despite inflation, the whole country generally is prospering. Farm family income slightly exceeds that of a city family, and there is a ratio of less than six to one between the earnings of the top 20 percent and the bottom 20 percent (much less inequality than in the United States). Korean builders are also busy elsewhere, with over six billion dollars in contracts with the Arabs.

South Korea's future is closely tied to its economic success. If US military support continues to decline, more and more of its own resources will go into defense against the North. Aside from a brief flurry in 1971, there has been no movement toward peaceful unification. Kim Il-song's demand before resuming the talks is the withdrawal of US forces. When that was done before, he attacked. At the DMZ one can look north through the field telescope and on a hazy day just barely see the golden glint in the diffused sunlight of a 40-meter-high gilded statue of Kim Il-song, one of 53 identical statues in North Korea, looking down toward the South.

R.J.M.

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